

**TOTTERING ASSOCIATIVE PROCESS IN CAMEROON:
COLLATERAL DAMAGE OF THE COTTON POLICY ADJUSTMENT**

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ABSTRACT

In Cameroon, associative process based specifically on the supply of input on credit dates back to 1987, with the creation of "Associations Villageoises Autogérées" (AVA). The liberalisation option later on led to a shift from the AVA to Common Initiative Group (CIG). The global functioning in the supply of inputs to farmers was little changed thanks to the implementation of the "Programme Spécial d'Importation des Engrais" (PSIE) which enhanced timely provision of inputs at quantities and qualities needed. Collective guarantee circles were set up to control the risk of bad management in large groups, hence creating a new associative layer within the village. The end of PSIE in 2001 has led to further adjustment of the associative process by the addition of a supra-village layer, the "Organisation des Producteurs de Coton du Cameroun" (OPCC).

The evolution of the associative process has gone along with cotton policy. This process which started with the development of cotton production has in turn contributed to its consolidation. It first spread following the liberal orientation of cotton policy then suffered from the abandonment of farmers in their effort to intensify cotton and food crops. If the option of leaving resource poor-farmers alone to take charge of intensification cost is not examined, it is doubtful that the associative process could become again efficient enough and contribute in the revitalization of cotton sector.

KEYWORDS: Cameroon, associative process, liberalization, cotton policy, input supply

INTRODUCTION

Cotton is the main export crop of the savanna zones in most countries of Africa. It is an important source of income for the rural populations living on agriculture. In Cameroon this crop occupies about 360 000 farmers with an average 0.58 ha of surface area. Since 2000, its production was around 250 000 tons of cotton seeds. Its plight since the independence of the country benefited from an efficient credit system to the production. Also it has played a major role in the spread of technical innovations and in the development of the zones concerned.

The positive impact of the organization of credit for the production and development of the cotton crop in Africa is not specific to Cameroon alone. It is a common feature to all cotton producing countries of the french-speaking Africa. This feature is expressed even through the organization of input credit in relation with the associations of producers. This relation confirms the position of Amparo (2003) believing that the organizations constitute the key element in the development process. The previous existence of traditional informal organizations certainly facilitated the appropriation of the idea of associative process (Network GAO, 1995).

In this paper, we want to show that the development of the cotton sector in Cameroon, but we think that these could also be true for most African countries, spread through the organization of producers in the management of the credit for the factors of production. This evolution has answered to the changes of cotton policies. There is a positive phase where the development of the cotton sector benefited from an efficient organization by the producers groupings, and vice versa. Then followed a negative phase, during which the working groups of producers may appeared unstable, what makes it even more difficult to restart the whole sector.

The 2nd section reviews the evolution of the associative process in Cameroon and the analysis in relation with the change of cotton policies. The 3rd section unveils the various aspects of the state that may trouble the associative process.

Associative process and evolution of the cotton policies in Cameroon

The French-speaking Africans system of organization of producers around inputs provision

The particularity of the African Franc Zone in the domain of the organization of cotton producers is well recognized today at the international level. There are also numerous documents on this particularity in different countries, through national or regional studies and analyses. After the independence of most African countries, the socialist orientation among several of them led them to organize, in an administrative or political manner, the peasants in their villages. Practically in all countries, this method did not quite give the expected result.

The success of grouping producers came from the cotton zones when the idea came to operate the groups around a specific production. This idea came at the time of crisis of confidence between the cotton society and the peasants in Mali in 1974 (Fok, 1993). The pursuit of the development of production was threatened then by the revelation that the peasants were abused by some management staff agents, at the level of quantities and quality sold, and also at the level of payment of inputs that had been delivered on credit to the peasants.

The first villager cotton association was created in Mali in 1974 as an experiment, with a goal to confide it to the farmers, after an adequate training, commercialization of the cotton-seed and the recovery of the input credit. From 1978, Mali started the training of villagers associations as a central element in its strategy of cotton development. Since the beginning of 1980, Mali has shared its experience with the other African countries, during a regional workshop. Then followed a similar engagement of associative process in most countries of the Franc Zone in Africa, with however some differences and some countries have even out spaced Mali. It is worthwhile mentioning that Ivory Coast has preferred the cooperative model. Benin quickly entered into a process of supra-villages organization, with a federal movement of various administrative echelons (Fok, 1993).

In all countries, the monopoly exercised on the commercialization of the cotton grants gives the cotton society mastery in the recovery of credits bestowed on the producers, to a point that it is also the main source of provision in the production of food crops. This system attracted the farmers toward the production of cotton so as to increase their incomes, and to benefit from fertilizer credits used in cultivating their food crops.

The good functioning of the credit system, with a recuperation rate close to 100% permitted the allocation of credit without discrimination. This mechanism contributed in the development of cotton in all countries of the Franc Zone in Africa. Achancho (2004) saw it being the starting point for the producers to acquire power of negotiation and decision making. Irène and Guido (2005) and John (2004) saw in this associative process founded on the management of the credit input the expression of a participative approach in the West Africa countries.

Delay of adherence to the system of the French-speaking Africa

Cameroon has the particularity to have adhered latest to the associative process as mentioned above. Nevertheless the interest was discerned to put a structure of dialogue in place between the cotton enterprise and the producers. The main objective was to transfer the organization

of some activities of the production chain to the village. The indigenous organizations enlightened, were inspired by the traditional organization of the campaign based on communal work and solidarity. In 1987 the "Associations Villageoises Autogérées" (AVA) was brought to light (Roupsard, 2000; Ahidjo, 2004), in the image of the associations or the indigenous groupings in the other cotton producing African countries.

The working of the AVA was highly bound to the "Société de Développement du Coton" (SODECOTON) as in all countries of the African French speaking zone. In fact the AVA took charge of two activities that the SODECOTON decided to externalize: the commercialization of the cotton-seed and the management of the inputs credit. They received a proportional remuneration to the marketed tonnage of cotton-seed in compensation of these two services rendered. In this functioning, the principle of bound guaranty played a primordial role. In case of repayment failure by a farmer, the group to which he belonged is responsible for reimbursement. To the cotton society, the risk of non repayment was thus greatly reduced.

Economic liberalism and inflection of the associative process

Adhering late to the associative process, Cameroon very quickly inflected it. The second half of the year 1980 coincided with the first world crisis of cotton that put the sector of the french-speaking Africa in a very delicate financial situation and especially since it depended mostly on the help of development partners (World Bank, Caisse Française de Développement, French Cooperation...). This period also corresponded to the rise in power of the structural adjustment plans put in place with the aim of reducing the implication of the State or parastatal enterprises in the economic functioning.

In this context, since 1994, the AVA was judged to be too subjected to SODECOTON. This report was the basis for their replacement by the Common Initiative Groups (CIG) of cotton; grouping with more autonomous functioning. The decision was at the same time taken to reduce/suppress the subsidies that SODECOTON gave the impression of applying on the inputs allocated to the groupings of producers.

The creation of CIG resulted from the government's will that had set in motion a certain number of authorized texts aiming to encourage the emergence of new stakeholders as the producer's organizations. This was the case of the law n° 90/053 of December 19, 1990 fixing the liberty of association to encourage the emergence of numerous producer's organizations, notably in the cotton zone. Close to 95.7% of the cotton producer's groupings were legalized under the shape of CIG in the SODECOTON delimited zone. The first change of the associative process was therefore a consequence of an agricultural political change, in line with the execution of the structural adjustment plans, that reverberated thus on cotton sector.

It led to a few consequences, in the domain of the prices of inputs given to the farmers, as the Government had put the "Programme Spéciale d'Importation des Engrais" (PSIE) in place to manage the help of the European Development Fund. The PSIE intended to import fertilizers and pesticides to the benefit of the farmers, but aimed at empowering them through their associative process. Thus an internal mechanism for the determination of input's prices, within the SODECOTON, was replaced by an external mechanism, with the European aid.

Indeed, after the suspension of subsidies provided by the state in 1994, the PSIE was going to sustain SODECOTON in the micro-credit. Producers could have regular access to the production factors and recommended doses. Prices of inputs were maintained relatively low at the beginning. A bag of NPK fertilizer (50kg) cost 3250 CFA francs, with credits offered at the required date and at the recommended doses. A strong increase of the prices of fertilizers reaching 253% (from 3250 to 11500 CFA francs) was noted thereafter, with a tendency at fluctuation (Enam et al, 2005), but resulting from the devaluation of the CFA francs in 1994.

On the organizational plan, another innovation is to put to the credit of the SODECOTON, anxious of the viability of the credit input and worried of the problems of repayment in groups of very important size producers. It fostered the creation of bound guaranty circles ("Cercles de Caution Solidaire"). A producer's

adherence to a circle of bound guaranty of a CIG is the condition of obtaining inputs on credit.

At the level of the villages, the associative process became more complex with the emergence of two organizational dimensions. Within the CIG, were created several circles of bound guaranty, uniting the producers who decided by themselves the regrouping, by affinity or by mutual understanding. The bound guaranty principle is thus put to work in two levels, within the bound guaranty circle, and within each CIG.

If the production is insufficient to repay the credit contracted by a farmer, the members of the guaranty circle are temporary in charge of the repayment while waiting for a regularization of the debt. In a contrary case, the faltering member will be excluded from the circle and the group and he won't be able to benefit anymore from the credit inputs in the next farming season. Otherwise, in the failure of a guaranty circle, the group is in charge of its repayment so that it can benefit from the credit of the next season. Finally, in the case of a failure by the group, it is excluded from the list of the CIG and would no longer be able to have the inputs on credit.

Theoretically therefore, the faltering members, for unjustifiable reasons, would be excluded of their bound guaranty circle. The process of exclusion can also be applied to the level of the CIG at the domain of the bound circles of guaranty. In this point, it is a collective exclusion that is in effect. If all goes well, with a reasonable cotton yield, the risks of a failure in relation to the contracted credit are contained and therefore few producers were excluded from the access to inputs credit. It is no longer so since 2002. However this exclusion also entails that of acquiring some inputs for the production of food crops. It is therefore the production of cotton and food crops that could be affected.

In short, the change of the associative process has not stopped the farmers from continuous benefit from fertilizer credits, as well as on cotton and on food crops. This is thanks to the European aid in the acquisition of inputs at a little subsidy, despite the increased prices due to the devaluation of the CFA franc. The inputs

(cotton seed, fertilizers, pesticides) were continuously provided at the demanded quantity and on time. There were certainly cases of non repayment by the producers, but globally the recovery of the credit was done in a satisfactory manner.

The associative process subjected to the change of price mechanisms

The stoppage of the PSIE in 2001 sounded the end of the external support for the producers with input supply. Probably this suspension was motivated by several factors among which an increase of non repayment or reimbursement by producers and their organizations, sometimes connected to embezzlements noticed at the level of CIG.

From 2001, SODECOTON found itself alone in the pursuit of input supply functioning. It coped by advancing the associative process and the related price mechanism. On the organizational and institutional plan, the "Organisation des Producteurs de Coton du Cameroun" (OPCC-GIE), national structure including all CIGs was introduced in 2001 with the assistance of SODECOTON. From 2002, SODECOTON progressively started transferring the input supply functioning (cotton seed, fertilizer and pesticides) to OPCC, beginning with their importation up to the villages. This new structure took into consideration the training of new CIGs at the village level, notably in the management of stock inputs. From 2004 to 2005 these associative movements evolved toward Autonomous Producers Groupings (APG) (managing the inputs in store and assuring the remuneration of their follow-up agents), the Producers Grouping with the Basic Mandate (PGB) and the Producers Grouping with the Management Mandate (PGM). The presence of the head of SODECOTON zone is needed for all exits of inputs from the store for the case of PGB and the PGM. He also does a regular control of the store. For the PGB the crop supervisors are paid by the SODECOTON. This function is assured by the grouping in the PGM (IRAM, 1997).

As regards to prices, the disappearance of external support resulted in an increase of the farm gate prices of inputs to producers, whereas the decrease of the world cotton price led at the same time to a fall in the purchase price of the cotton-seed to the

producers. These ones took upon themselves in a well known phenomenon of the price scissors, unfavorable to the profitability of cotton. The decrease of this profitability accentuated the risks of inability of repayment of credit inputs.

Faced with this risk that was concretized in 2004, the SODECOTON, in agreement with the OPCC, decided to reduce the doses of inputs to lower the amounts and the risk associated to the input credit. This measure carries the germ of a production decrease by reducing the expectation of the output. It also reduced the expectation of output of food crop production, either by reducing the carry over effects of the mineral fertilization of cotton on the food crops or the possibility of diverting the fertilizer for cotton to food crops.

Clearly, the evolution of the associative process reflected the changes of cotton policies. This evolution resulted in Cameroon through structural changes on the organization and functioning of the cotton production chain, and more precisely on the organizations of producers. This was not without consequences on the farmers (CIRAD, 1999, Deveze, 2000, Dello, 2001).

In a space of two decades, one moved from a scheme with two structures (SODECOTON and AVA) to four structures (SODECOTON, OPCC, GIC and circles of bound guaranty). The present state of the organization of the producers with three dimensions (national, villager, sub-villager) can be in itself a sign of positive evolution to sustain assigned roles more efficiently. Unfortunately this evolution arrived at the same time with unfavorable changes of the relative prices between inputs and cotton produced. It penalizes the viability of the credit that was, and still remains, the corner stone of the associative process.

UNSTABLE STATE OF THE ASSOCIATIVE PROCESS

An active associative process

Since 2005/2006 cropping season, the number of CIG and the surface area has evolved in a decreasing manner. The production reduced since 2004/2005 by 54% up to date (Table 1). The kilogram of cotton seed experienced the lowest level (172 CFA francs) and fertilizers (NPK) cost 15500 CFA francs per bag in 2006. The associative movement lost 104 CIG that is

19760 members, accompanied by a reduction of 41% of surface area for cotton.

Table 1: Evolution of organizational and production parameters

	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08
CIG	1715	1723	1779	1762	1835	1792	1731
Members	325850	327370	338010	334780	348650	340480	328890
Circles of Guaranty		21184	21899	22828	23902	24085	
Members/Circles	-	15	15	15	15	14	-
Surface (ha)	201576	181810	208204	215027	231993	203023	137868
Production (Ton)	246070	233803	242819	304252	220844	187448	1440800

Source: SODECOTON 2008

The associative process remains active due to the financial incentives from the cotton company, as bonuses granted to the various persons in charge of the CIG. It concerns notably:

- Bonus for herbicide sale (100 CFA francs / sachet of herbicides sold)
- Bonus for cotton surface area (3500 CFA francs /ha cultivated)
- Bonus for support of intensification (100 CFA francs /sacs of NPK and urea sold)
- Production or yield bonus
- Excess of bridge topples.

There is however signs of evaluating weakness in the functioning of the CIG. The evaluation of members per group (figure 1) at its creation around 1994 shows a significant number of members, with an average of 241 per CIG. Ninety four percent of members are essentially men. Cotton is traditionally an export crop reserved to the head of households, therefore mostly men. Globally, the total average of the members within CIG experienced a reduction from 241 to 190, but the men remain the majority (close to 91%). The evolution of the average number of members within a CIG is confirmed by 50% of the producers investigated, whereas the majority (69% of respondents) considered that the CIGs maintained their activities (figure 2).

The reduction of members within the CIG results from the dissolution of the older groups (scissions) in the villages and the abandonment of cotton production by farmers. The dissolution of groups,

testimony of disagreement among the farmers, are often due to suspicion on the management, enforced by the lack of transparency on the part of the person responsible for the CIG and difficulty contested due to the authority of these ones according to traditional rules¹. The only exit for the unhappy producers is to constitute a new group or to migrate towards existing ones, or abandon cotton cultivation.

Even though the evolution is weak, the number of female members of CIG seems to increase. The opportunist behavior more manifested by men compared to the women, would explain this light growth. Men do not hesitate to leave the group once they do not realize an interest.

Averagely, each CIG includes close to 12 circles of guaranty bound, composed of about 15 to 20 members. The adherence to a bound guaranty circle is according to the farmer's choice. There are no definite clear criteria. According to the persons responsible for the groups, the members agree in general assembly and designate the head of circle who then belongs to the wide office of the CIG. There are however implicit criteria for farmers to regroup in the same bound guaranty circle. The most quoted adherence criteria are: hard work, competence of the members of the group, family relationship, neighborhood, honesty and credibility.

The head of guaranty circle plays a primordial role and participates in the active life of the CIG as well as all its meetings or activities. Finally, the various information of the SODECOTON and the OPCC passes through the heads of guaranty circles who transmit it to the members.

¹ The chief of village sees his social position being increased by giving him the title of honorable President with the possibility of influencing decisions.

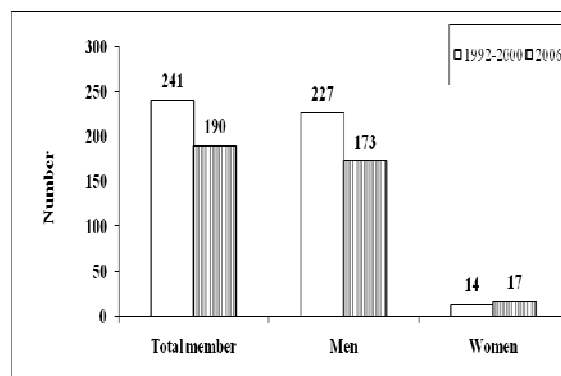


Figure 1: Evolution in the membership number

Source: Result of investigation

In principle, the formal solidarity of the producers vis -a -vis the input credit only limits itself to the bound guaranty circle to which they are jointly members. In reality, this solidarity is completed by another form in the context of the functioning of the villages. When a farmer is to be excluded from a bound guaranty circle, it is possible for him to have access to inputs credit through another producer, member of another circle. However this phenomenon can undermine the viability of the system of inputs credit.

An apparent viability of the inputs credit

The inputs credit is repaid at the sale of cotton seeds. The OPCC or the persons in charge with the market recover the equivalent amount of the credit and the rest of the sale income goes back to the producer. The difficulties appear in cases where the balance of production is negative.

The repayment of the inputs credit operates according to two mechanisms. The first corresponds to the repayable credit from the source that means during the sale of the cotton seed. The purchase team deducts the corresponding amount to the credit to revert it in the CIG account. The second type of repayment presents itself when the producer reverts his debt in the CIG. It can occur well ahead of the sale of cotton. At the end of the commercialization season every CIG is held to transfer its recoveries to the service of the agricultural inputs credit of the OPCC. With these repayment systems, the OPCC virtually recovers all its debts. It is within the bound guaranty circles that one meets cases of non repayment of the credits by

some members. The circles assume the security bond of a faltering member, equally for the CIG vis-à-vis circles. The exclusion of a CIG can occur in case of a deficit vis-à-vis the OPCC.

The OPCC realizes almost a 100% of recovery rates; an apparently comforting state.

According to Joffre (1999), this success could lead to the intensification of cotton and food crops production in sub-saharian African countries. Meanwhile deficits of up to 3 million CFA francs are recorded showing the functioning difficulties. This is due to the misplacements of the persons in charge of the CIG and the members of the bound circles of guaranty. Imputed on the incomes of the producers, they would achieve a beneficial margin reduction of 111 to 895 CFA per hectare. Eleven percent of CIG (200 out of 1835) are suspended or present cases of mismanagement in inputs, making a total of 38000 out of 348650 members. Every member² having achieved a beneficiary margin of 30590 CFA francs for the 2005/2006 season, this amount would result to a loss to each of the 38000 producers (Table 2).

Table 2: Inputs credit situation within 2005/2006 cropping season

Situation	REGIONS				
	Ngong	Mayo-Galké	Maroua Sud	Other regions	The whole region
CIG number	228	150	259	1198	1835
CIG under difficulties	33	7	13	111	164
Income after reimbursement (CFA franc/ha)	81000	73400	116100	111017	381517
Surface area (ha)	31713	24972	30942	24061	111688
Suspended from inputs credit	0	1	0	35	36
Credit amount (CFA franc/ha)	2307216055	1900656140	1310156615	4121364391	9639393201
Reimbursed amount (CFA franc/ha) ¹	2303698320 (99.84%)	1892718030 (99.58%)	1295990110 (98.92%)	4099833309 (99.46%)	9592239769 (95.52%)
Non reimbursed amount (CFA franc/ha)	3517735	7938110	14166505	21531082	47153432
Non reimbursed amount /producer (CFA franc/ha)	111	318	458	895	422

Source : SODECOTON

¹reimbursement rate

² Each CIG counts presently 190 members (Figure 1).

A fragile credit system at the level of the federation of producer's groupings

The responsibility of inputs supply has been transferred to the OPCC with insufficient funding. This organization regularly struggles with financial problems. It has not often been able to honor its payment engagements on time with its suppliers, which in return has caused them not to provide her with the best services, in respect of quantities, quality and time of delivery.

To sustain the lack of funds or the running budget situation, OPCC must get indebted with commercial banks to continue its supply of agricultural inputs. The financial expenses that resulted from the lack of funds are felt in the increase of the farm gate price of these inputs to the producers (OPCC-GIE, 2005).

Another way of adjustment is to limit the quantities of inputs acquired, sometimes deliberately below the needs expressed by the producers. SODECOTON tried to reduce this need by decreasing the doses per hectare, envisaging to limit the level of indebtedness of the cotton producers. If they want to use normal doses, they must buy the extra in cash, whereas the producers have limited or no financial resource.

For some years back now, OPCC delays delivery to its suppliers. It can be due to the failure more or less wanted by them, but it can also result from a phenomenon out of the cotton sector control, notably the railway network failure of CAMRAIL which always surfaces first.

Globally, the inputs have become more expensive at the producer's level (Table 3). Their accession is more and more bound to certain conditions. They are no more provided with the quantity expected by the producers, and are often delivered late. On the other hand, cotton-seed is no longer well paid for. The purchase price of cotton-seed is drastically dropping continuously under the influence of the drop in the world price and the weakness of the dollar compared to euro and thus to the CFA franc (SODECOTON, 2005).

Table 3: Evolution of the purchase price of cotton seed and fertilizers (CFA franc)

Price	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07
Cotton seed	193,1	182,6	179,0	185,0	189,0	172,3	-
Fertilizer NPK	11 500	12 000	11 500	11 500	12 500	13 500	15 500
Urea	10 000	10 500	10 000	10 000	11 000	11 500	15 200

Source: Result of investigation

System of credit mined by the decrease of cotton profitability

The functioning of the inputs supply founded on the associative process attained dissatisfaction of the producers. This first lies on the decrease of the cotton profitability with corollary difficulties of the input credit repayment. This situation surfaces in the commercialization of the cotton seed by the reduced income on the sale of the cotton seed from the level of the producers up to the level of the cotton society. Between 2000 and 2005 the profit margin varied between 163600 and 103700 CFA francs/ha thus a reduction of 37% (SODECOTON, 2005).

The surface area for the cotton crop didn't evolve with 81% of members. Fifty percent of producers noticed a reduction of their CIG members. The activities within the CIG remain unchanged by 69% of respondents (figure 2). The producers count on the credit whose access has the tendency of complicating itself for the cotton seed production. The withdrawal from cotton production, either by abandonment, reduction of the surface area for cotton and of the intensification level, leads to a reduction of the total cotton seed production. On the other hand a weak income situation is performed on the sale of cotton seed, for most below the invested capital. More over there are situations of unpaid credit at different structural levels of the association (individual, circle of guaranty, CIG). These mutations impacted the capacity of repayment and even affect the producers achieving profit margins.

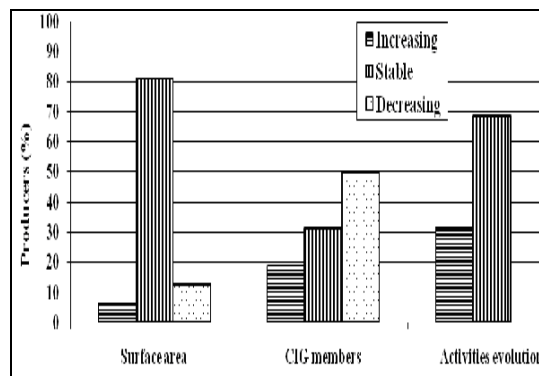


Figure 2: Producer's opinion on the activities within the CIGs

Source: Result of investigation

The perception of the decreased profitability by the producers is such that a considerable proportion among them (62%) is ready to abandon cotton for food crops (Figure 3). The reasons raised are linked directly to the un-profitability of cotton and the inputs credit, the bad relationship with SODECOTON (SADEL-GIE, 2003). Indeed 69% of the producers complain of poor performance of cotton, 86% of poor relationship with SODECOTON, probably due to the function of the inputs credit, because 82% of them are not satisfied with the stoppage of the direct implication of SODECOTON in the inputs credit.

The abandonment of cotton by an important fraction of producers (62%) is translated by a reduction of cotton production at the level of the country in the same proportions. It aggravates the financial difficulties of the sector making the functioning of the inputs credit more difficult.

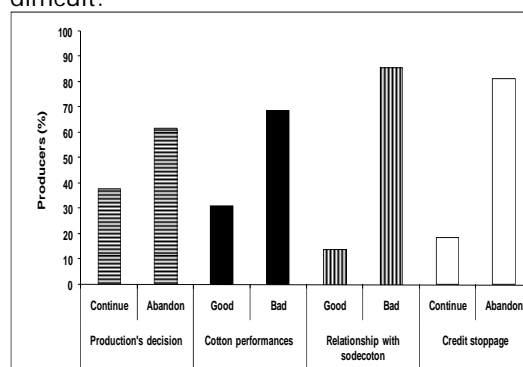


Figure 3: Producer's perception on cotton production chain

Source: Result of investigation

The reduction in intensification results in lower outputs, especially when the inputs are provided late and are therefore not used at the best moments. The reduction of the income that follows makes it difficult for the repayment of the credits gotten. The failure of the individuals, the circles of bound guaranty or the CIG in repayment becomes more frequent, thus threatening the viability of the credit system.

At the level of the guaranty circles, the functioning difficulties were observed through the exclusion of members. This solution doesn't prove to be sufficient enough to assure the viability of the credit system for those excluded. When they don't abandon the cotton crop, they can lean against other producers to acquire inputs, increasing the risk for those to become non solvent in their turn.

The System undermined by peasant perception and their adaptive behaviour

To the farmer's perception of less profitable cotton crop, is added the feeling of abandonment in their food crop production. Among the food crops inputs credit acquisition conditions future the farmer's commitment to produce cotton and the adherence to cotton CIG. Since 2002 the fulfilment of this condition results in a low credit inputs for food crop (worth 50% of the purchase cost). This evolution proceeds from the deliberate attempt of the SODECOTON to maintain the cotton crop attractive through food crops support, but the support appearing partial.

Unfortunately the farmer does not have the necessary financial resources to pay the required supplement for the food crops inputs. There is therefore a tendency to deviate a part of the cotton input (fertilizers and herbicides) to cereal crops (maize). Such a behavior affects cotton production and the viability of the inputs credit system. It thus globally follows an adverse phenomenon of the intensification of the cotton crop. This phenomenon is first of all imposed by the change going on in the organization of the input supply system, where the function is transferred to a young peasant institution insufficiently equipped with means. After this phenomenon is exacerbated by the adaptation behavior of peasants who prefer to reduce the inputs rate given to cotton deviating it to food crops.

This behavior has been observed many years back. The OPCC and the SODECOTON tried to put together their efforts in the organization and follow up³ to limit the cotton input deviation toward food crops production. Despite the dispositions taken, they have not succeeded in reducing the phenomenon of deviation of inputs and of the adverse intensification on the cotton crop. The adherence of farmers to the associative process appear to be above all an alibi to benefit from inputs, either to fully guaranty the food crops production in an imperial objective of food safety or to obtain cash in reselling the inputs acquired on credit.

CONCLUSION

In Cameroon the associative process based on cotton production, and most particularly on the inputs credit supply is very recent than in other French speaking countries of Africa (1987). The AVA was created in a cotton sector organization marked by the state involvement, more particularly in the inputs acquisition at a reduced cost. As early as the end of 1980 the economy liberalization option in the framework of structural adjustment helps the evolution of the association process as from 1994. The wish to reduce the interventions of the state or its parastatals enterprises (like SODECOTON) has struggled to separate the cotton producers grouping from the bosom of the SODECOTON. This was obtained through the transformation of AVA to CIG, equipped with a legal status. Meanwhile the global functioning of the inputs supply to producers was slightly upset, thanks to the putting in place of PSIE. This program permitted the continuous provision of inputs in quantity, quality and on time, even if the farmer gate price has considerably increased, above all due to the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994.

³ *The input management in stuck is assured after supply by the SODECOTON and by the OPCC within CIG. It is assured by the group follow up agent or the SODECOTON culture surveyor. After distribution to producers according to the expressed needs under the supervision of the bound guaranty circles, the unused stuck of fertilizers are returned to the SODECOTON apart from the quantity in the storehouse. A punctual follow up mechanism is put in place by the group follow up agent and the culture surveyor for the verification of the effectiveness of its utilization in the farms.*

To restrain the risks of bad management of inputs credit, the bound guaranty circles were established, thus creating a new dimension of associative process within the villages. This disposition did not sufficiently found itself, the repayment rates of credit dropped, notably followed by the cessation of PSIE in 2001.

From this date the cotton sector is totally abandoned to itself for the follow up of the supply of inputs. It is faced with the adjustment of the associative process, in adding a new dimension, this time supra-villager, by the putting in place of the OPCC in the form of "Groupement d'Intérêt Economique" (GIE). The lack of means, penalized by an unfavorable world market, could not help the OPCC to fulfill its function correctly in inputs supply rendered very expensive, delivered in insufficient quantities and often very late. The consequence of an imposition of an adverse intensification is exacerbated by the anxious behavior of farmers to assure crop production in diverting a part of the cotton inputs. This has effects in the reduction of the performance in terms of cotton production thus threatening the viability of inputs credit.

The associative process has led to a proper evolution of the cotton policy. It started with the development of cotton and has later helped to strengthen it. This process has first of all moved through the liberal orientation of the cotton policy, then to the giving up of producers in their efforts of intensification of cotton and food crops. Without efforts of sharing the intensification cost in order not to live it to the sole responsibility of the farmer's limited means, the associative process would hardly balance itself and carry with it the cotton sector redevelopment. For the adaptation of contextual rapid changes would be among others:
to accompany the autonomous process and the associative organizational system "cotton" vis-à-vis the SODECOTON to diversify the groupings activities for risks limitation

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