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DOSSIER DE CANDIDATURE A L'INSCRIPTION SUR LA LISTE D'APTITUDE AUX FONCTIONS DE CHARGE DE RECHERCHES (LAFCR)

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Comité Technique Scientifique (CTS) Lettres – Sciences Humaines

1. ARTICLES SCIENTIFIQUES

Guirguissou MABOUDOU ALIDOU

Assistant de Recherche

INSTITUT NATIONAL DES RECHERCHES AGRICOLES DU BENIN (INRAB)

****

CENTRE DE RECHERCHES AGRICOLES NORD-OUEST (CRA-NO)

****

Session 2018

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Comité Technique Scientifique (CTS) Lettres – Sciences Humaines

ARTICLE SCIENTIFIQUE N°2

Maboudou Alidou Guirguissou and Anke Niehof (2012). Generating Income and Conflicts: Profitability and social cohesion in Benin's Cotton Sector. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Organizational Studies, Volume 7(1), 2012, pp. 33 – 46.* ***IF 2016 (SJR 0,13).***

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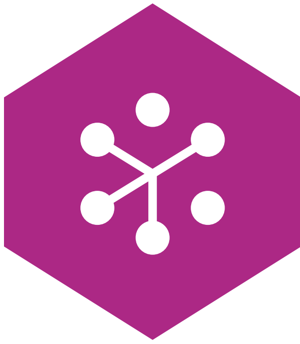

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 1

The International Journal of

Interdisciplinary Organizational Studies

COMMON GROUND

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The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Organizational Studies

The Social Sciences Collection

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 1 2012

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES
*www.*thesocialsciences.com

First published in 2013 in Champaign, Illinois, USA
by Common Ground Publishing LLC
www.commongroundpublishing.com

ISSN 2324-7649

© 2012-2013 (individual papers), the author(s)
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Scope and Concerns

THE DISCIPLINARY WORK OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Each of the sciences of the social is marked by its distinctive disciplinary modes—the thinking practices of Anthropology, Archaeology, Behavioral Sciences, Cognitive Science, Communications, Cultural Studies, Demography, Economics, Education, Geography, Humanities, Law, Management, Media, Politics, Policy Studies, Psychology, Social Welfare, Sociology, to name a some of the principal sciences of the social. The disciplinary variation is so broad that practitioners in some of these areas may not even consider their discipline a 'science', whilst in other disciplines there is a general consensus about the scientific character of their endeavor.

What is a discipline? Disciplines represent fields of deep and detailed content knowledge, communities of professional practice, forms of discourse (of fine and precise semantic distinction and technicality), areas of work (types of organization or divisions within organizations such as academic departments or research organizations), domains of publication and public communication, sites of common learning, shared experiences of apprenticeship into disciplinary community, methods of reading and analysing the world, ways of thinking or epistemic frames, even ways of acting and types of person. 'Discipline' delineates the boundaries of intellectual community, the distinctive practices and methodologies of particular areas of rigorous and concentrated intellectual effort, and the varying frames of reference used to interpret the world.

And what is a science? Some of the studies of the social habitually and comfortably call themselves 'sciences', but others do not. The English word 'science' derives from the Latin 'sciens', or knowing. Return to the expansiveness of this root, and studies of the human could lay equally legitimate claim to that word.

'Science' in this broadest of senses implies and intensity of focus and a concentration of intellectual energies greater than that of ordinary, everyday, commonsense or lay 'knowing'. It is more work and harder work. It relies on the ritualistic rigors and accumulated wisdoms of disciplinary practices.

These are some of the out-of-the-ordinary knowledge processes that might justify use of the word 'science', not only in the social sciences but also in the natural, physical, mathematical and applied sciences:

Science has an experiential basis. This experience may be based direct personal intuition of the already-known, on interests integral to the lifeworld, on the richness of life fully lived. Or it might be experience gained when we move into new and potentially strange terrains, deploying the empirical processes of methodical observation or systematic experimentation.

Science is conceptual. It has a categorical frame of reference based on higher levels of semantic precision and regularity than everyday discourse. On this foundation, it connects concept to concept into schemas. This is how science builds theories which model the world.

Science is analytical. It develops frames of reasoning and explanation: logic, inference, prediction, hypothesis, induction, deduction. And it sees the world through an always cautiously critical eye, interrogating the interests, motives and ethics that may motivate knowledge claims and subjecting epistemic assumptions to an ever-vigilant process of metacognitive reflection.

Science is application-oriented. It can be used to do things in the world. In these endeavors, it may be pragmatic, designing and implementing practical solutions within larger frames of reference and achieving technical and instrumental outcomes. Or it may be transformative—redesigning paradigms, social being and even the conditions of the natural world. What, after all, is the purpose of knowing other than to have an effect on the world, directly or indirectly?

Science can be any or all of these experiential, conceptual, analytical and applied things. Some disciplines may prioritize one or other of these knowledge processes, and this may be the

source of their strength as well as potential weakness. In any event, these are the kinds of things we do in order to know in the out-of-the-ordinary ways worthy of the name 'science'.

The Social Sciences conference, journals, book series and online media provide a space to discuss these varied disciplinary practices, and examine examples of these practices in action. In this respect, their concern is to define and exemplify disciplinarity. They foster conversations which range from the broad and speculative to the microcosmic and empirical.

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK OF THE SOCIAL AND OTHER SCIENCES

Interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary or multidisciplinary work crosses disciplinary boundaries. This may be for pragmatic reasons, in order to see and do things that can't be seen or done adequately within the substantive and methodological confines of a discipline. Broader views may prove to be more powerful than narrower ones, and even the more finely grained within-discipline views may prove all-the-more powerful when contextualized broadly. The deeper perspectives of the discipline may need to be balanced with and measured against the broader perspectives of interdisciplinarity.

Interdisciplinary approaches may also be applied for reasons of principle, to disrupt the habitual narrowness or outlook of within-discipline knowledge work, to challenge the ingrained, discipline-bound ways of thinking that produce occlusion as well as insight. If the knowable universe is a unity, discipline is a loss as well as a gain, and interdisciplinarity may in part recover that loss.

Interdisciplinary approaches also thrive at the interface of disciplinary and lay understandings. Here, interdisciplinarity is needed for the practical application of disciplined understandings to the actually existing world. Robust applied knowledge demands an interdisciplinary holism. A broad epistemological engagement is required simply to be able to deal with the complex contingencies of a really-integrated universe.

The Social Sciences conference, journals, book series and online media are spaces in which to discuss these varied interdisciplinary practices, and to showcase these practices in action across and between the social, natural and applied sciences.

WAYS OF SEEING, WAYS OF THINKING, AND WAYS OF KNOWING

What are the distinctive modes of the social, natural and applied sciences? What are their similarities and differences?

In English (but not some other languages), 'science' suffers a peculiar semantic narrowing. It seems to apply more comfortably to the natural world, and only by analogy to some of the more systematic and empirically-based of the human sciences. It connotes a sometimes narrow kind of systematicity: the canons of empirical method; an often less-than reflective acceptance of received theoretical categories and paradigms; formal reasoning disengaged from human and natural consequences; technical control without adequate ethical reflection; an elision of means and ends; narrow functionalism, instrumentalism and techno-rationalism; a pragmatism to the neglect broader view of consequences; and conservative risk aversion. These are some of the occupational hazards of activities that name themselves sciences—social, natural or applied. In studying the social setting, however, it's not good enough just to have a rigorous empirical methodology without a critical eye to alternative interests and paradigmatic frames of reference, and without a view to the human-transformational potentials of knowledge work.

Humanistic methodologies sometimes address the social in a deliberate counterpoint to science, distancing themselves from the perceived narrownesses of scientific method. This move, however, may at times leave science stranded, separated from its social origins and ends. The natural and technological sciences are themselves more subject to contestation around axes of human interest than the narrow understanding of science seems to be able to comprehend. Whether it be bioethics, or climate change, or the debates around Darwinism and Intelligent Design, or the semantics of computer systems, questions of politics and ideology are bound closely to the ostensible evidence. Faux empiricism is less than adequate to the address the more important questions, even in the natural and technological sciences. Science can be found lacking when it is disengaged from the humanistic.

The humanistic, however, has its own occupational hazards: disengaged critique and supercilious inaction without design responsibility; political confrontation without systematic empirical foundation; ideological fractiousness without apparent need for compromise; the agnostic relativism of lived experience and identity-driven voice; voluntarism that leads to a naive lack of pragmatism and failure in application.

A reconstructive view of the social, natural and applied sciences would be holistic, attempting always to avoid the occlusions of narrow methodological approaches. It would also be ambitious, intellectually and practically.

In this context, the Social Sciences conference, group of journals, book Imprint, and online media pursue two aspirations, two openings. The first is an intellectual opening, founded on an agenda designed to strengthen the theories, the research methodologies, the epistemologies and the practices of teaching and learning about the social world and the relation of the social to the natural world.

The second opening is pragmatic and inventive. All intellectual work is an act of imagination. At its best, it is ambitious, risky and transformative. If the natural sciences can have human ambitions as big as those of the medical sciences—the fight against MS or cancer or Alzheimer's, for instance—then the social sciences can have ambitions as large as to settle the relation of humans to the natural environment, the material conditions of human equality and the character of the future person.

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The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Organizational Studies
Volume 7, 2013, www.thesocialsciences.com, ISSN 2324-7649
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Generating Income and Conflicts: Profitability and Social Cohesion in Benin's Cotton Sector

Guirguissou Maboudou Alidou, Wageningen University, Wageningen, The Netherlands and Institut National des Recherches Agricoles du Bénin, Porto-Novo, Benin
Anke Niehof, Wageningen University, Wageningen, Netherlands

Abstract: This paper is based on field research in the northern Benin, West Africa. The research aimed to investigate how interpersonal and intra-organisational conflicts disrupted cotton production and froze collective action. Cotton has proven to be the lifeline for farmer organisations, and has driven collective action in rural areas. The struggle to control these organisations and their economic and social benefits created mismanagement and free-riding reactions. The greed for resources, in the end, led to hatred, disruption of ties, and conflicts within and between farmer organisations, which resulted in the decline of cotton production and the freeze of collective action. Results from case studies show that social relations based on kinship and friendship deteriorate when financial stakes are high, and that cooperation within large groups requires legal sanctions to be sustainable.

Keywords: Cotton Production, Collective Action, Social Cohesion, Benin

INTRODUCTION

For the last two decades, cotton has been the most important crop in Benin, both in terms of the percentage of the population involved in cotton-related activities and the income generated by the crop. The boom in cotton production from the end of the 1980s has impacted many other economic domains in the country. This boom owed not only to market incentives but also to the dynamics of the organisations that evolved around cotton production. The most important of these organisations are farmer organisations, which instilled new dynamics into the sector to make it successful. In turn, farmer organisations have been shaped by cotton farming and have depended on its levies for their functioning (Kouton et al. 2006). From the resources generated by cotton production, collective action was sustained in villages where communities provided themselves with basic services that were not supplied adequately by the state: education, health, roads, and other infrastructure. The success of the sector increased the visibility of cotton-related organisations and their leaders who grew in importance both economically and socially, at local as well as national level. But cotton as source of income also became a source of conflict, because of divergent interests. Cotton interests stirred appetites and attracted new entrepreneurs in cotton production who invaded the organisations under the pretext of improving the management. This led to conflicts within and between organisations and organisational breakdown, and inflated the number of organisations. The ensuing conflicts disrupted the social cohesion in the organisations and communities, and resulted in the decline of cotton production and the freeze of collective action. The ultimate consequence has been the loss by many small-scale farmers, of their main, or even their only source of income.

Studies investigating the causes of the demise of cotton production in Benin, however, have pointed at technical and trade issues. Regarding the latter, namely cotton subsidies in industri-

The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Organizational Studies
Volume 7, 2013, www.thesocialsciences.com, ISSN 2324-7649
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alised countries, are associated with the decline of cotton prices on the international market, causing important losses to producers in developing countries. A debate about the removal of these subsidies opposed the two groups of countries in international forums. The attention focussed on the outcomes of the debate, to the extent of overlooking the dark side of the internal institutional dynamics in cotton organisations. While in Benin, farmer organisations have been pictured by some as enabling social inclusion (Tama-Imorou and Wenninck 2007; Tama-Imorou, Wenninck, and Nederlof 2007), others (e.g. Sinzogan et al. 2007) saw them as pawns caught into heavy institutional arrangements and enduring the externalities of global policies. The problem of the atomization of farmer organisations that subsequently occurred was not seen in relation to the inter-personal and intra-organisational conflicts that increasingly affected cotton farming. Indeed, far from undergoing passively the effect of external contingencies, cotton farmer agency in Benin has impacted the trend of cotton production. Therefore, to revive the sector needs a closer look at the critical issue of its organisational dynamics is required.

The purpose of the present research is to investigate how interpersonal and intra-organisational conflicts have disrupted cotton production and frozen collective action. The research was conducted through focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and in-depth interviews with 148 farmers including both grassroots farmers and organisation leaders. The article first discusses the theoretical perspective used in the research and then pictures the cotton system in the cultural setting of the study area. In the following sections, the emergence of collective action in the study area is described and an analysis is presented about how conflicts and violence expanded throughout the cotton production zones and were manipulated by traders and intellectuals to enter cotton organisations, resulting in the disruption of social cohesion and the demise of collective action. Two cases will be presented to highlight these processes. The article concludes with a brief discussion on the implications for cotton production.

Theoretical Perspective

The issue of group dynamics has been approached through a focus on the production and use of resources and the management of interpersonal relations. Both affect the cohesion of groups, thereby determining their ability for cooperation. Cohesion and cooperation within a group determine its ability to overcome internal difficulties as well as threats from outside.

Experimental studies of cooperation stem from the so-called 'Prisoner's Dilemma' model, from which the concepts of the "public goods dilemma" and the "resources dilemma" originated. The two concepts were grouped together as "social dilemmas" (Kollock 1998; Komorita and Parks 1995). A social dilemma is defined as "a situation in which a group of persons must decide between maximizing selfish interests or maximizing collective interests" (Komorita and Parks 1995, 190), leading to "tension between individual and collective rationality" (Kollock 1998, 183) in the production and use of public goods. The use of public goods, in contrast to their production, puts actors in the 'commons dilemmas' or a 'social trap', a situation in which individuals are tempted by an immediate benefit of which the cost has to be shared by all users of the resource. The problem of cooperation in social dilemmas poses a critical issue of trust.

The role of trust in organisational setting is widely acknowledged by numerous researches in various disciplines. Trust represents "a positive assumption about the motives and intentions of another party [and] allows people to economise on information processing and safeguarding behaviours" (McEvily et al. 2003, 92–93). Misztal (1996, 18) defined it as "the willingness of other agents to fulfil their contractual obligation that is crucial for cooperation". Trust has two key features: the psychological and the behavioural (Kramer 1999). The psychological feature, associated with cognition, entails the trustor's perceived vulnerability, while the behavioural one pertains to the interactions between actors. Trust has three functions: the integrative function, the reduction of complexity, and the lubricant for cooperation (Misztal 1996). The lubricant function cooperation for collective action possible and ensures group cohesion. Cohe-

sion, as the sense of belonging of group members, is determined by incentives found through membership. The "collectivity is structurally cohesive to the extent that the social relations of its members hold it together" (Moody and White 2003, 106).

The present research hypothesised that the demise of collective action in cotton-producing areas resulted from the decline of social cohesion within cotton organisations. It aims at understanding how the social dynamics of cotton organisations fizzled, in spite of incentives provided by the sector that should allow an enduring cooperation for the benefit of the whole.

The Cotton System

The Socio-cultural Setting of the Cotton Zone

In Benin, the departments heavily impacted by cotton production are those of Borgou and Alibori in the North. Between 1990 and 2010, these departments together accounted for 48 to 80 per cent of the national production (AIC 2008). Alibori is considered the cotton belt of the nation, while Borgou is the food belt though also producing an important share of cotton. Together they formed the Benin part of the pre-colonial kingdom of "*Borgu*", dominated by the "*Baatombu*" (Jones 1998).

Before the partition of 1898 *Borgu* was a kingdom, stretching from North Benin to Northwest Nigeria (Kuba 2000). The term *Borgu* designates a socio-cultural, political and economic space with complex and diverse power relations between the different ethnic groups (Boesen, Hardung, and Kuba 1998). It also comprised other ethnic groups, namely the *Boo*, *the Mokole*, the *Fulani,* cattle breeders and herdsmen, the *Gando,* and the *Dendi*, migrant traders descending from the *Wangara* of Mali (Brégand 1998). The *Baatombu*, the *Boo* and the *Fulani* are considered the indigenous groups, the *Baatombu* being land owners (Jones 1998). The large majority of the other ethnic groups, however, speak *Baatonum*, the language of *Baatombu*.

Borgu'*s* economy was "land-based, with few resources to attract external trade" (Adekunle 1994, 1), though it was located at the crossroads of important commercial networks between the *Yoruba* and *Hausa* states of Nigeria and the former Songhay empire (Kuba 1998). Due to colonisation, the kingdom disintegrated politically and economically. In addition, urbanization and modernization have transformed *Baatombu* society and have weakened community cohesion and some practices of solidarity. But even so, contemporary Borgou exhibits the hierarchical structure of the ancient *Borgu*, quite "complex and rigid" with the noble or aristocratic *Wassangari* at the top, and commoners who are cultivators and hunters at the lower end (Lombard 1960, 1998). In spite of its ethnic diversity, Borgou is socially integrated through cultural practices and processes that aim at peace keeping. Among them is the joking relationship, which involves cross-cousins, kin of alternate generations, different craftsmen, and neighbouring ethnic groups. It forms a harmless outlet for social tensions within and between groups (Brydon 2010). By joking people avoid open and destructive antagonism due to jealousy or competition" and give "proof of solidarity with every joke they gamely endure" (Schottman 1998, 159). Neither the socio-cultural customs and beliefs nor the historical links between the different ethnic groups have completely disappeared. These links are alive across borders and ethnic consciousness among the *Baatombu* sub-groups is still strong (Akinwumi 1998). The social organisation of the society in chiefdoms around the central kingdom still plays a role. Each *Baatombu* society has several layers of historical titles and political offices that are still locally relevant and conserve their attributes of power (Alber 2004; Harneit-Sievers 2002).

The First Cotton Elite: The Rise of School Dropouts

During the Marxist-Leninist era in the 1970s, farmer organisations were purposefully promoted throughout the country by the military regime as a form of village associations. These associ-

ations were used to infiltrate and control the grassroots populations. This logic is reflected in their name: *Groupement Révolutionnaire à Vocation Coopérative (GRVC)* (Maboudou Alidou 2002). The revolutionary cooperatives served as the basis for the process that took place from the end of the 1980s onwards, i.e. the networking among farmer organisations. But where the GRVC had almost no freedom of action and was constrained by political control, the present *Groupements Villageois* (GV) are autonomous. Belloncle, cited by Tossou (1993) contended that the emergence of new forms of farmer organisations coincided with the appeal for a real dialogue between farmers and developers after the rural development approaches of the 1960s and 1970s failed to live up to expectations. The shift of status also benefited from the advent of democracy when the 1990 National Conference put an end to the socio-political unrest of the second half of the 1980s. This policy shift gave the new forms of organisations a level of importance that previous organisations never had. It also led to the emergence of a new elite: that of school dropouts.

Northern Benin was characterised by a low rate of literacy and, apart from primary school teachers, rarely did intellectuals lived in the villages. The first rural literacy program in Benin started in the department of Borgou during the 1970s, to train the GV managers in reading and counting in the local language. The acquired skills were used in cotton production to report inputs distribution among members, and in cotton commercialization (Abou-Moumouni 2011). But the skills turned out to be insufficient when cotton production became really important. School dropouts then started taking over the daily management of the GVs. The little literacy they had constituted a highly appreciated asset for farmer organisations, where they would occupy the positions of secretary on the board. Later on, the secretaries turned out to be crucial board members, due to the critical importance of their role in the redistribution of inputs, the commercialisation of cotton, and payment. Until recently, in many farmer groups the two other important board positions, namely that of president and treasurer, were occupied by virtually illiterate persons. This enabled secretaries to encroach upon the responsibilities of the president and the treasury. With the atomization of cotton organisations, this pre-eminence of the secretaries led members to equate the organisation with the secretary. The most common answer to the question about which organisation a farmer belongs to is: "*I am in the organisation of secretary X or Y*".

The development of cotton production paralleled the capacity building of rural organisations. Leaders of organisations were earmarked for all kinds of training. Their acquired skills would allow them to relate directly to donors and other outsiders, mediating for their populations (Olivier de Sardan 2005). Thanks to the booming cotton production and the huge outputs the sector generated, farmer leaders grew in importance, both economically and socially, thereby becoming role models for young people in the villages. Leaders of cotton farmer organizations formed a distinctive social class in their localities. They were blessed with various social and economic privileges that distinguished them from the others. Inter-connected from village to department, they tended to self-reinforce the system by putting in place institutional arrangements, irrespective of what was stated in statutes and laws. Lack of control allowed the leaders to manage public resources as their own. By staying on the board infinitely, some of the leaders used the power they held not only for the community but also for themselves. As a result, their social ascension led to power abuses and mismanagement that escalated free-riding behaviour.

Cotton Production and Collective Action

There were three constituent functions of the village associations: driving up agricultural production, including food crops; facilitating access to credit and tools; and serving as the basis for the emergence of a cotton elite (Roy 2010). These functions are assumed mainly by agents at positions of authority, who are in charge of promoting solidarity within the group and collective action for the benefit of group members and the community at large.

The ancient *Borgu* is characteristic of the collective action that stemmed from cotton production. Through a combination of community- and hierarchy-based approaches (Kiser 1997) rules and institutions were created within cotton production communities, endorsed by the State's assistance policy to promote collective action. Despite the low level of literacy of the organisations' leaders, collective action was effective there and benefitted the communities, as is still visible in villages. It seems probable that the success of collective action in this area was boosted by certain socio-cultural values. In *Baatombu* society, selfishness was strongly detested and sacrifice for the group highly appreciated. Studies of Borgou socio-cultural characteristics have revealed the importance of an orientation towards others, "shown to be of crucial importance for grasping the dynamic social construction of group identities, and the various power and exchanges relations between populations groups" (Breusers 2000, 311–312). With regard to sociological argument that cultural and structural factors are the determinants of collective action (Kiser 1997), it infers that the society bears some of the requirements for the emergence of collective action. Communities availed themselves of basic services that were not adequately supplied by the state. Collective action driven by cotton production concerned a wide range of domains going from education to the maintenance of roads as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Collective Action in Studied Districts

Types	Infrastructure	Level (Village or District)
Social and community infrastructure	Agricultural inputs stores	Both
	Schools (buildings or entire schools)	Both
	Residence for school directors	Village
	Students residence at university (Cotonou)	District
	Water pumps/wells	Both
	Rural roads	Both
	Health centres	Both
	Leisure centres	Both
	Equipment for modern music orchestra	Village
	Lodging centres	District
	Municipal buildings	Both
	Public lightening	Both
	Kerosene selling points	Village
	Football fields	Both
	Rural Radio	District
	Mosques	Village
Payment	Salaries for community teachers	Both
	Assistance to students	Both
	Assistance to the municipal council	Both
	Contribution for the realisation of infrastructure by partners	Both
Maintenance	Maintenance of community infrastructure	Both
Source: Focus group discussions, January 2009		

Because the departments of Borgou and Alibori were known for their low levels of school attendance, collective action first backed up education at local level. Communities built schools and recruited teachers who were paid from cotton levies. This community support for education became a phenomenon known as "*Enseignants communautaires*" that spread throughout the country. Until recently, farmer unions at district level used to pay the tuition fees for school girls sent to the departmental boarding school. Residences were also built on the university campus to house students from districts like Banikoara, Gogounou and Sinende. The example convinced other district unions to do the same and inspired students from other cotton-producing districts to claim similar benefits from the cotton levies their district earned.

In addition, farmer unions built lodging houses in most of the districts where such infrastructure and services could be hardly found. Municipal buildings and leisure centres were built in villages, making the farmers proud, as illustrated by the following quote: "*This building where we are meeting actually is not built by a Minister; it is our own Minister, i.e. our hoes and effort.*" (Source: Focus group discussion, Sekere, January 2009). This shows how farmers were empowered, availing themselves of basic services that are supposed to be provided by "ministers". These achievements made the deprived villages in the region more appealing and lively. But because of power abuse, cotton production became troublesome and deprived rural populations of their potential for development.

The Rise of Conflicts and Violence

The dynamics of farmer organisations have always been idealised, overlooking their weaknesses that undoubtedly hampered the sustainability of the cotton system. Evidence in other West African cotton producing countries, however, showed that cotton farmers played a role, directly or indirectly in the way the process of cotton development unfolded (Bassett 2001). Far from being passive actors, Benin cotton farmers have greatly influenced cotton production through their agency. First, positively, by their contribution to the increase of production, and second, negatively, by the confrontational way into which the management of their organisations lapsed.

Typology of Conflicts in Cotton Farmer Organisations

From the end of the 1990s, the cotton sector in Benin has been overwhelmed by various conflicts that undermined the cohesion of cotton organisations. These conflicts were identified and ranked by farmers during focus group discussions according to their frequency. The ranks range from 1 (most frequent) to 9 (least frequent). Table 2 shows the ranking of the conflicts according to farmers, and the comparison of mean ranks between grassroots farmers and leaders.

Table 2: Rank of Conflicts in Cotton Organisations

Rank	Nature of conflicts	Grassroots Farmers (62)	Leaders (46)	Overall (108)	F	Sig.
1	Inputs allocation	3.0	3.2	3.1	.181	.675
2	Lack of payment	3.5	3.7	3.6	.284	.595
3	Application of joint liability	3.7	3.7	3.7	.016	.900
4	Mismanagement of resources	4.8	3.9	4.4	4.666	.033
5	Commercialisation of cotton	4.6	4.5	4.6	.035	.853
6	Leadership	5.5	4.6	5.1	3.544	.063
7	Lack of commitment at work	6.5	6.2	6.3	.405	.526
8	Outlets for inter-personal arguments	6.6	7.4	6.9	3.444	.066
9	Payment of membership fees	6.9	7.9	7.3	8.088	.005
Source: Field survey, 2010–2011						

The mean ranks of the frequency of four types of conflicts showed significant differences between grassroots farmers and leaders. Leaders ranked mismanagement-related conflicts higher than grassroots farmers ($p<.05$). Indeed, the eight breakaway organisations investigated emerged from claims of mismanagement. Seven of them reported mismanagement-related conflicts. Also leadership-related conflicts were ranked higher by leaders than by grassroots farmers ($p<.10$). Having a leadership position gave access to both material and financial inputs that improved the livelihoods of leaders and enhanced their visibility in the community. This explains why conflicts about inputs allocation are ranked first in the overall ranking. This position reflects the critical importance of fertilisers and pesticides in cotton production. Controlling inputs gave enormous power to farmers' leaders, who could use these for purposes even unrelated to cotton. The payment of membership was also a cause of conflicts and ranked significantly higher by grassroots farmers than by leaders ($p<.005$). Farmers struggled to control their organisations and the social processes and power play involved. These processes were aggravated, however, by new types of actors who invaded cotton production.

The First Uprising: "Orou Bagou" vs. "Orou Sori"

The district of Gogounou witnessed the first inter-community conflict resulting from the 1990s production boom. The conflict resulted in the emergence of the first cotton dissident organisation. It opposed farmers from two villages: Sori and Bagou. Both villages were important cotton producers and participated in the management of the district farmer union, on which board Bagou held more power than Sori. A native from Bagou was appointed as a vice-president and destined to take over the lead of the union. The president at the time, who was then also leading the national federation of farmers, was controversial on the grounds of being illiterate, being involved in mismanagement, and extending his 'reign' for years. The contestation was led by natives from Sori, who requested him to step down. Sori, the most urban village in the district, had been contesting the position of Gogounou as the district capital for some time. Therefore, Sori could not accept to be deprived of certain positions by the village of Bagou, which cotton farmers were accused of connivance with the controversial president in the mismanagement of union resources. Farmers from Sori decided to resolve the matter by taking control of properties of the union.

In October 1997, tens of farmers filled up a truck and invaded the village of Bagou to seize selected properties of the union controlled by the vice-president, thereby triggering a violent conflict between the two villages. A pitched battle opposed the two groups of farmers at midday, resulting in a lot of destruction and hatred. It was the first and most violent conflict between the two neighbouring villages since they grew cotton. Therefore, the opposed parties were nicknamed "*Orou Bagou*" and "*Orou Sori*", referring to the camps of Bagou and Sori respectively, the term "*Orou*" being the *Baatombu's* birth rank name assigned to the first son (Schottman 2000). Although there were no casualties, the protagonists want to forget about the conflict because of its violence and the dire consequences it generated. None of the men in the male focus group discussions in the two villages mentioned it; but the women in the female focus group discussions did. They timidly stressed its violence and referred us to the men if we wanted more details. Silencing the conflict appeared to be a "shared denial of painful realities" (Cairns and Niens 1999). Cotton had become a nightmare, and some wondered why they ever went so far in their disputes. At the time of the fieldwork, the conflict was still pending at the court, like many other conflicts in cotton production. Nevertheless, the contesters succeeded in creating the first breakaway organisation in cotton production, supported by traders and businessmen. This tumultuous experience that unfolded in the district of Gogounou inspired the claim of its producers to be the "laboratory of cotton networks".

Political Interferences and the Advent of Traders and Intellectuals in Cotton Organisations

The success story of cotton production contributed to a great extent to improving people's perceptions of agriculture. Before cotton became a critical livelihood asset, agriculture was not highly valued and being a farmer had a lower social status. Thanks to the boom in cotton production, this status improved and agriculture became a new type of entrepreneurship. The wealth generated by cotton to formerly deprived farmers attracted new farmers. With the number of people involved in its production, cotton also became an instrument that political leaders sought to control for electoral purposes. The contestation of cotton "illiterate leaders", voiced on the ground of embezzlement, became politically motived. Indeed, two succeeding Ministers of Agriculture, activists from different political parties that were strong-holding one of the largest cotton-producing districts, supported opposing wings within the farmer union to get control over the organisation for electoral purposes. This struggle between local politicians is captured in the following quote from the agricultural advisor to the Head of the State:

> *The profound but unsaid motive of the conflict and the atomization of cotton networks was political. Every politician in the area wanted to have the farmer federation under his sway. Therefore, they backed up the emergence of dissident networks.*
> Source: Key informant interview, Banikoara, January 2011

Meetings to settle the disputes convened as high as the Presidency yielded no or little result, because leaders of cotton organisations became aware of their importance. To the Head of the State, who asked the contested leader to step down, the latter dared replicate: "*If it were so easy to step down, why did you refuse when you were requested to do so*", referring to the President's refusal to step down at the 1990 National Conference to end the country's socio-political unrest of the 1980s. To resolve the tense situation, the President asked whether the contesters could create their own organisation, which, according to witnesses, triggered the atomization of cotton organisations. Henceforth, the best solution to disputes within an organisation has become the creation of "one's own organisation". As a consequence, the local conflict within a district union resulted in the fragmentation of the national federation. The conflict was also fuelled by rivalry about a farmer's wife who was allegedly snatched by a

leader, showing how some leaders abused their power. Traders and retired civil servants skilfully used the discontent to engage in a struggle for a "better management" of the organisations. They started practicing cotton production, however marginally. These new farmers were termed "farm goers" instead of farmers by the leaders of the original federation, arguing that they were simply attracted by the profits. In addition, inputs suppliers and cotton ginners relying on their political contacts, encouraged dissidence among farmers and actively supported the new entrepreneurs to create dissident organisations. About 29 per cent of breakaway organisations promoters in the sample were newcomers in cotton production. Leaders of this category represented about 16 per cent of the total leaders. Their influence can be grasped by observing their level of involvement in the organisations. They all occupied positions at the highest level in the hierarchy from where they could attend important board meetings and influence the process of decision-making. Though some had been moonlighting as farmers, many others had never planted cotton. Some started cultivating cotton from their involvement in the organisations, growing the minimum necessary to be considered a cotton farmer. A retired leaders said: "*I cultivate cotton because I am on the board of the network*".

Being a cotton farmer was no longer a condition for membership of cotton organisations, which shed doubt on the intention of the new leaders to improve the management of organisations. Their main motive was to gain financially from the crop. A former federation leader contended that "*creating cotton organisations has become a business to cheat farmers and be enriched*". Therefore, the intrusion of traders and intellectuals is seen by farmers and their former leaders as the main source of the trouble the sector and its actors have been experiencing. About the atomisation of cotton organisations and its corollaries of tension, a farmer expressed his grievance as follows:

> *You [intellectuals] are the only ones responsible for conflicts within and between cotton organisations. Our woes originate from the top and the solution may come from the top. Write down on your note book: We are disgusted by your cotton.*
> Source: Focus group discussion, Sekere, January 2009

Indeed, pensioners and traders led and masterminded the emergence of seven of the eight dissident organisations. But trust usually collapsed after a short collaboration. The promoters started accusing one another of secretly negotiating contracts with input suppliers and receiving money from ginners before the cotton was produced, thereby subordinating the organisations to the whims of businessmen. The most frequent accusations were mismanagement of resources, illicit enrichment, bad social behaviour, and the denial of legality and a pronounced taste for racketeering. The vocabulary used by the former proponents who soon became opponents was rich with words such as 'illiterate', 'bandit' or 'crook'. The scramble to take control over these organisations and their resources resulted in never-ending inter-personal and intra-organisational conflicts.

The Altruist and the Saint

Anda is a retired agricultural engineer who gave himself the title of "*itinerant benevolent advisor to cotton networks*". He considers himself an experienced authority on cotton and he wanted the cotton farming community to benefit from that. Having headed an agricultural extension agency for years and having worked in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Anda still has connections within the ministry. Because of that, he took it upon him to provide proofs of embezzlement and to confront the "illiterate leaders", during the conflict between "*Orou Bagou*" and "*Orou Sori*". He worked together with his friend Segue, a retired primary school teacher. Anda and Segue jointly led the contestation that resulted in the emergence of the first breakaway organisation. They wrote the statutes and Anda's home served as office.

The organisation, however, was led by another newcomer, a trader who funded the initial activities. Both friends held a position on the board, Segue as the secretary and Anda as the advisor. But a year later, they could not trust their leaders, whom they accused of racketeering. Consequently, they created "their own organisation", always sharing roles on the board. But while Anda "*never has cropped a plant of cotton*", Segue grows cotton.

At the end of their first cotton campaign, Anda and Segue had a dispute about the redistribution of huge amounts of money, about which both have a different story. According to Segue, Anda would have claimed a percentage for advising the organisation. But according to Anda, Segue would have used the resources for personal purposes. While Segue considers himself a saint who "*never has misused one franc*", Anda assumes he is "*hated for his righteousness*". After they had masterminded and headed two dissident organisations, the once "best friends" ended up in exchanging correspondence in which they accused each other of greed and misconduct. Anda was finally thrown out of this second organisation. The two friends had a different interpretation of the experience. Segue acknowledged that they "*were the best friends in the world*", whereas Anda denied their previous friendship.

The Brothers-in-law

Sidi and Boni are brothers-in-law. Boni is a farmer, and Sidi a trader. When Boni was approached to lead a breakaway organisation backed up by executives of the State cotton parastatal company to "*thwart the actions of private companies and secure supplies to the State cotton ginning mills*", he contacted Sidi to help spreading the new organisation throughout the cotton belt. As Sidi said:

> *I was a trader and I did not grow cotton. They involved me in this nightmare. I was at home when they knocked on my door. They said they wanted to create a cotton network that would be profitable and asked for my financial support. Who would refuse the promise of profits?*

As promoters of the organisation, they shared the roles on the board. Boni became the president and Sidi the secretary. They vied with contending organisations to get farmers adhere to theirs. But quarrels about the redistribution of production outcomes and other benefits broke the trust that had prevailed at the outset of the endeavour. Sidi then plotted to overthrow Boni from the lead. With the newly appointed leader, he signed a deal by which the organisation was engaged to reimburse a private credit he got using his position as secretary. But Boni made a successful come-back as the president on the board. The credit scheme was discovered and Sidi was sent to jail. The former allies are now mutually accusing each other of falsification, theft, and money grabbing.

The Decay of the "*Caution Solidaire*" and the Demise of Collective Action

The "*caution solidaire*" is a collective commitment to pay for cotton inputs allocated to groups by all the affiliated members and is based on the joint liability mechanism. The mechanism was first used by the Grameen Bank to overcome traditional banking policies of lending that require physical collaterals, and which could not be applied to disadvantaged poor people (Rai and Sjöström 2004; Ghatak and Guinnane 1999). The formulae became popular in developing countries to give poor people access to credit. Among the reasons mentioned by scholars for its success are the reduction of "transaction costs", the "peer-pressure", and the use of "social capital" (Ghatak and Guinnane 1999).

In Benin's cotton production, the *caution solidaire* allowed farmers access to basic inputs to cotton production without any collaterals. The mechanism contributed to the production boom

by protecting farmers from the incertitude of affording inputs. The *caution solidaire*, however, was misinterpreted and showed its limits later on due to its misuse. In its implementation, the only requirement to get credit was membership of an organisation. Therefore the only guarantors were the boards of the organisations, and not individual farmers. In addition, the organisations were so large that members hardly knew one another. As a result, all actors involved drew unduly huge advantages from the scheme. Inputs suppliers made profits by over-supplying inputs to farmer organisations, regardless of their real needs. Leaders in turn misused the stocks of inputs by giving inputs to acquaintances who were neither members of an organisation nor producing cotton. Entire villages and organisations used more inputs than they needed and could afford. Because the mechanism entails the deduction of inputs credit before farmers are paid, cotton repayment became erratic. Free-riding behaviour of farmers trying to compensate their arrears increased, rendering the inputs credit recovery more problematic. Henceforth, the primacy was given to self-interest at the expense of the group, inflating the indebtedness of organisations. As more positive attitudes and cooperation derived from higher levels of trust (Dirks and Ferrin 2001), it can be asserted that lower levels of trust result in more negative attitudes, lower levels of cooperation and performance. As a solution, the *caution solidaire* was extended from village level to district and department level, a strategy termed the communalisation and departmentalisation of the *caution solidaire*.

The extension of the *caution solidaire* aimed at securing the repayment to inputs suppliers, ignoring the problems of farmers. Indeed, with the departmentalisation of the *caution solidaire*, a village or an organisation could reimburse for an unknown village or organisation without the consent of its members. This aggravated the indebtedness in the sector by delaying the payment and increasing inter-organisational conflicts. Mismanagements affected common resources that were meant for collective action, leading to their scarcity. Thus, collective action was drastically reduced and frozen in many districts. Joint actions by multiple organisations became impossible, their relationships being dominated by distrust. Leaders mutually accused one other of mismanagement and plotting against their respective organisations, providing that fear and greed inhibit behaviour that contribute to public goods (cf. Komorita and Parks 1995).

Conclusion: Killing the Goose that Lays Golden Eggs

Cotton production yielded important amounts of resources, which allowed rural and semi-urban communities to avail themselves of the basic infrastructure the State failed to supply them with. The early stage of the boom in cotton production revived the hope of a better life in rural areas. However, the resources generated stirred the appetite of traders and intellectuals who skilfully took control over farmer organisations. But these new cotton entrepreneurs turned out to be more greedy and self-interested than the former leaders. The lack of enforcement of rules combined with the decline of some cultural values such as unselfishness encouraged mismanagement practices that remained mostly unpunished. As a consequence, mistrust and its corollaries of free-riding behaviour and lack of cooperation increased, freezing collective action. Cotton production, previously considered the most profitable crop and a cash cow, became troublesome for individuals and communities. The dynamics showed that both the psychological and the behavioural components of trust are indispensable for an effective cooperation within groups. This is easier to realise within smaller groups, where members can exert more control on one another and feel personally committed to their obligations. Hence, enforcing limits to the size of cotton farmer organisations would improve their functioning and preserve the public goods.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Guirguissou Maboudou Alidou: graduated as a sociologist with an MA at the University of Abomey-Calavi (Benin). As research assistant in the "Sitotroga Project" at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA-Cotonou, Benin), he achieved an MSc at the University of Lomé (Togo). He is research associate at the Program of Agricultural Policy Analysis of the National Institute of Agricultural Research of Benin (INRAB). Actually completing a Ph.D at Wageningen University (The Netherlands) on cotton networking, social capital and gender roles, his research topics also include adoption and diffusion of technologies and social impact assessment.

Prof. Anke Niehof: was trained as an anthropologist and demographer and holds the Chair of Sociology of Consumption and Households at Wageningen University, the Netherlands. She is also the coordinating professor for gender education at the university. Her research topics include food and livelihood security, household and family care, and impacts of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa.