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FROM AD HOC TO DURABLE?

Development cooperation and institutional bricolage in the
cotton sector in Benin

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Institute of Development Studies

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July 2021

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature: _____

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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DPHIL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

FROM AD HOC TO DURABLE?
DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND INSTITUTIONAL BRICOLAGE
IN THE COTTON SECTOR IN BENIN

SUMMARY

This thesis is about the history of development encounters in the cotton sector in Benin. It presents a perspective that is centred on the long durée of the host context instead of the short-lived and specific experiences of each cotton project. I substantiate this change of perspective by addressing the following question: how has the cotton sector in Benin come to incorporate the institutional arrangements of development cooperation projects into enduring institutions? This thesis contends that development projects, although temporary and specific, are inserted into a historical continuum that has regularised development cooperation practices over time, and that is perpetuated by both implementers and hosts. Thus, while a project in isolation appears to be unable to change the wider structure and practices, successive processes of institutional bricolage with project components may.

In the first three chapters, I describe the learning journey that led me to my research question and outline its relevance to contemporary debates on development. I go on to detail the conceptual framework and research methods. In the third chapter, I define the boundaries of my research, situating it in the history of Benin's cotton sector since independence in 1960 until 2018. I identify the successive waves of development assistance projects taking place over this period. In chapters four to seven, I examine how development cooperation projects have shaped the structure and practices both of subsequent projects and of the cotton sector itself. The conclusion discusses and reviews my findings in light of my research question. It appears that institutional bricolage with projects' institutional arrangements is a process shaped by power relations in which early experiences have particular weight. This research shows that the way projects work depends on their place in the historical trajectory of development cooperation in the host context. It thus contributes to our understanding of how projects work in a certain way and in a particular moment in time.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABC	Agência Brasileira de Cooperação Brazilian Cooperation Agency
ACC	Association Cotonnière Coloniale Colonial Cotton Association
ADB	African Development Bank
AFD	Agence Française de Développement French Development Agency
AIC	Association Interprofessionnelle du Coton, Cotton Interprofessional Association
ANaF	Association Nationale des Femmes Agricultrices du Bénin National Association of Women Farmers of Benin
AOF	Afrique Occidentale Française French West Africa
CARDER	Centre Action Régionale pour le Développement Rural Regional Action Centre for Rural Development
CFDT	Compagnie Française pour le Développement des Fibres Textiles French Company for the Development of Fibres and Textile
CIRAD	Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement French Agricultural Research for Development
CmiA	Cotton made in Africa initiative
CPV	Conseiller en Production Végétale Vegetal Production Advisor
CRA-CF	Centre de Recherche Agricole Coton et Fibres Cotton and Fibre Research Centre
CVPC	Coopérative Villageoise des Producteurs de Coton Village Cooperative of Cotton Producers
FN-CVPC	Fédération Nationale des Coopératives Villageoises des Producteurs de Coton National Federation of Village Cooperatives of Cotton Producers
FUPRO	Fédération des Unions de Producteurs Federation of Unions of Farmers
GDP	gross domestic product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit German International Cooperation Society
GV	Groupeement Villageois Village Cooperative
GVPC	Coopératives Villageoises des Producteurs de Coton Village Cooperatives of Cotton Producers
IDA	International Development Association
IFDC	International Fertilizer Development Center
INRAB	Institut National de Recherche Agricole du Bénin National Agricultural Research Institute of Benin
IRCT	Institut de Recherche du Coton et des Textiles Exotiques Research Institute of Cotton and Exotic Textiles
ITK	Itinéraire Technique Technical Itinerary

Lasdel	Laboratoire d'Études et de Recherches sur les Dynamiques Locales et le Développement Local
LEC	Lutte Étagée Ciblée Staggered Pest Control
MAEP	Ministère de l'Agriculture, Élevage et Pêche Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries
MDRAC	Ministère du Développement Rural et de l'Action Coopérative Ministry of Rural Development and Cooperative Action
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NPK	nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium
OBEPAB	Organisation Béninoise pour la Promotion de l'Agriculture Biologique Beninese Organisation for the Promotion of Organic Agriculture
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAFICOT	Support for Textile Cotton Sector Project
PROCOTON	Cotton Producers Organisations Strengthening Programme
PTF	Partenaires techniques et financiers Technical and Financial Partners
RDR	Responsable Développement Rural Rural Development Manager
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
SODECO	Société pour le Développement du Coton Company for Cotton Development
SONACEB	Société Nationale
SONACO	Société Nationale Agricole pour le Coton National Agricultural Company for Cotton
SONAGRI	Société Nationale pour la Production Agricole National Company for Agricultural Production
SONAPRA	Société Nationale pour la Promotion Agricole National Agricultural Promotion Company
SSC	South-South cooperation
TAZCO	Transition Agro-écologique des Zones Cotonnières Agro-ecological Transition of Cotton Producing Zones
U-Com- CVPC	Union Communale des Coopératives Villageoises des Producteurs de Coton District Union of Village Cooperatives of Cotton Producers
UD-CVPC	Union Départementale des Coopératives Villageoises des Producteurs de Coton Departmental Union of Village Cooperatives of Cotton Producers
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WACIP	West African Cotton Initiative Project
WTO	World Trade Organization
XOF	Franc CFA CFA Franc
ZBCP	Zou Borgou Cotton Project

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This research is about encounters: what we bring to them and what we take from them. I am interested in understanding how experiences in development projects shape practices in the host context and in subsequent development encounters. I contend that projects create short-term and specific dynamics that, in isolation, are unable to change wider structures, but that successive processes of institutional bricolage with project components may.

Prior to the PhD I worked as a development cooperation project manager in multilateral and bilateral organisations. During my first trip to a host country, I realised that ‘bringing change’ was more complicated than I had expected, and that our three-year project would have a negligible impact on the country’s reality. The processes we generated within the frameworks of the project were so different from the dynamics of the host context that I doubted that they could endure after the end of the implementation period. The realisation of the mismatch between the project and the context made me question the purpose of development projects. For a moment, I wondered why we spent time and money planning, implementing, and evaluating projects that were so disconnected from the host context that they were doomed to fail. At the same time, such mismatch was the purpose of the project itself. If there were no difference between project and context, change could not be envisioned. Thus, the project-context mismatch that troubled me was less about differences between arrangements and practices within and outside projects; it referred to the hierarchical and patronising relationship between project and host context. The normative tone in development project vocabulary sounded inappropriate in light of everything that happened outside projects spaces, which seemed to have more weight in the everyday lives of our partners.

In Benin, I contributed to the implementation of several technical cooperation projects, ranging from cultural heritage to port management. In every project I had the feeling that there was much more going on than I could see. This feeling was particularly present when working in the cotton sector. Cotton is Benin’s main economic sub-sector, contributing to 70% of export incomes (MPD, 2018), involving multiple strata of society and thereby the object of programmatic struggles. Due to its importance to the country’s economy, the sector has been, historically, a key beneficiary of development cooperation interventions: it has hosted a multitude of projects since the country obtained independence in 1960, and potentially shapes Beninese actors’ everyday lives. The project I helped to implement was one of many, both products and producers of a history of development encounters. I

subsequently found myself inserted into a continuum of projects, in which current practices are shaped by past experiences that have endured through time.

Before I explore this further, I will describe my learning journey in the study of aid and development cooperation, with a critical look at the concept of the project. I will then summarise my thoughts as I detail the aim and scope of this research.

1.1. Perspectives on the project-context mismatch in aid and development cooperation

My concerns about the effectiveness of development cooperation are shared by many practitioners and researchers who put ‘aid at the crossroads’ (Eggen and Roland, 2013; Ramalingam, 2013). On one hand, development interventions are utopian blueprints that do not fit into the host context and introduce resources that are diverted towards national elites’ self-interests (Easterly, 2006, 2013; Moyo, 2009a, 2009b); hence aid should be discontinued. On the other hand, only a ‘big push’ with bigger and more ambitious projects combined with better understanding of the host context could end world poverty (Sachs, 2005). At the core of criticism is development interventions’ inability to structurally change the host context, which arises from the mismatch between development intervention plans and the host context’s own dynamics, history, geographies, and politics.

In this section, I share the learning trajectory I undertook in this research. I start by exploring the origins and dimensions of the mismatch between development interventions and the host context. Then, I present elements of two paradigm shifts: the project-centred paradigm shift that enabled the emergence of approaches to reducing the mismatch with context; and the paradigm shift that emerged alongside South-South cooperation (SSC), in which the project-context mismatch is overlooked because of the context-similarity claim. Finally, in the last sub-section, I move from the perspective of donors and providers to the perspective of the context on the interplay with projects.

1.1.1. The project-context mismatch in development practice

As an entry point to understanding the project-context mismatch in development practice, I start with Escobar’s (1995) perspective of development as an authoritative discourse that has succeeded in imposing a hegemonic worldview and forms of intervention that have categorised and hierarchised countries’ historical trajectories. The constitution of such discourse is a historical process in which structural and unequal power relations between countries, spaces, people, knowledge, and practices have endured. From this perspective,

when development emerged as an international policy in the second half of the twentieth century, it reproduced colonial patterns of relations between countries of the Global South and those of the North. Maldonado-Torres (2007, p.243) defines the continuation of colonial relations beyond colonialism as ‘coloniality’, or, in his words, the ‘long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration’. Mudimbe (1999, p.2) recalls that colonisation comes from the Latin word *colĕre*, which means ‘to cultivate’ or ‘to design’, arguing that colonisers ‘tended to organise and transform non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs’. Therefore, colonisation and coloniality rest on a paradigm of difference, in which colonised spaces, people, knowledge, and history are marginalised and subordinated to Euro-North American-centric concepts of modernity (Mudimbe, 1999; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, 2015). Such classification of the world framed international development policy, as the coloniser-colonised dichotomy that organised North-South relations gave place to the categories of ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ (Rist, 2014, p.73). From this perspective, development policy could only emerge through the perpetuation of the concept of the inferior, colonial ‘other’ – or of absolute otherness, in the case of African societies, as Mbembe (2001) suggests. This is to say that had colonial relations ended with colonisation, countries’ experiences would be equalised instead of contained within a poor-rich continuum that created – or maintained and reinforced – differences, and justified development interventions. As a result, development became a synonym of change, but not just any change: change that is oriented towards Western experiences and success.

The invention and imposition of a hierarchy between social experiences and trajectories created the necessity to promote development, framed as a social economic status based on the experiences of world powers and that excluded alternative trajectories. As a result, development became a process entrenched in contradictions. The roles of former colonies in international trade after the advent of development are an example of the contradictory purposes and practices of intervention. In this context, dependency thinkers argue that, in spite of political decolonisation and promises of industrialisation through development assistance, the role of the former colonies – the periphery of the capitalist system – continued to be to provide resources, mainly commodities, to the metropolises – the centre (Amin, 1974; Prebisch, 1988). This outward-directed growth model defined the position of the periphery in the world trade system. This was a disadvantageous position that would only degenerate, as the price of manufactured goods, supplied by the centre, increased faster than the price of

commodities, leading to a deterioration of the terms of trade and therefore to a limitation of the gains in the periphery (Amin, 1974; Harvey et al., 2010; Prebisch, 1950, 1988). In the West African context, at the time of independence, the colonies were integrated into the world system in these conditions, already indebted and unable to invest in structural reforms – but aid served to perpetuate such dependency (Amin, 1974). This example shows the contradiction between development discourse and practice: development discourse praised industrialisation as a path to development, but the promoters of development never enacted structural economic changes to make the periphery competitive in the international market. On the contrary, the centre adopted policies that preserved their own economies by protecting vulnerable sectors and promoting free trade when they had competitive advantage (Prebisch, 1988). As we shall see throughout this dissertation, the support for the development of the cotton sector in Benin falls into these contradictions.

As a consequence, the development project, as a form of intervention, at the intersection of discourse and practice, has been constantly contested but has remained the classic tool for framing development encounters. As Apthorpe (2007, pp.264–265) indicates, development policy is aid, and aid's instruments – or guided missiles – are projects and programmes. As such, I approach the development project as the localised – in the sense that it is limited in time and space – expression of international development discourse. However, as Mbembe (2001, p.5) asserts, in order to avoid overemphasising the impact of discourses, it is important to recall that discourses have materiality, since the 'social reality is made of a number of socially produced and objectified practices'. Thus, the existence and the constitution of the self as a 'reflexive subject also involves, doing, seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling, and touching' (Mbembe, 2001, p.7). In this sense, the development project is a social space in which the dichotomies of North-South, donor-recipient, dominant-subaltern, and project-context materialise.

As I have suggested above, the mismatch within the development encounter is unavoidable. It is development's – and therefore also the project's – *raison d'être*. The mismatch has at least two dimensions. First, it is a mismatch of agency, as power is unequally distributed in development discourse and practice. Second, it is a mismatch of content, as the solutions that projects propose usually do not fit with the host context. In *The Will To Improve*, Tania Murray Li outlines these dimensions as she studies a series of development interventions in Indonesia, from the Dutch colonisation to the twenty-first century. With regards to the first dimension of the mismatch, Li finds out in her historical analysis that 'improvement programmes' continuously served the interests of implementers, even after structural

changes in the ways projects were implemented. Changes in project implementation mechanisms are ‘a way to reassert the authority of experts and of the State’ and did not represent a will to converge interests but to inscribe villagers’ interests in the preconceived project’s framework (Li, 2007, p.196). According to Li (2007, p.15), ‘trustees’ and ‘subjects’ – or donor and recipient, expert and indigenous – are on different sides of an intangible boundary separating ‘those who need to be developed from those who will do the developing’. Thus, she identifies a contradiction in development projects, as they aim to tackle inequalities but in fact reinforce them both within and outside project spaces.

Such power asymmetry between donors and recipients comes to light in the content of projects. Had projects been a space with more equal relations between donors and recipients, they would not implement arrangements and practices that do not match the host context experiences. Ferguson (2007) demonstrates this mismatch of content as he describes the project aim of expanding cash crops in a context in which the male population was employed in mining, and livestock and crop production had a strong cultural root that was much more complex than the project document described. Thus, the project-context mismatch leads to uncertain outcomes, as hosts reappropriate project elements and give them their own meaning based on political interests that projects tend to ignore.

The unequal power relations and the inappropriateness of intervention plans illustrate the coloniality of development. However, such inherent characteristics have not remained unchallenged; practitioners, researchers, and policy makers have attempted to address the mismatch and tried to take projects closer to the host context.

1.1.2. Project-centred paradigm shifts

The development project framework has been the subject of criticism that has enabled the elaboration of multiple innovative approaches to changing the aid paradigm and reducing the project-context mismatch. Already in the early years of aid, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the international community started to move away from evolutionist and linear approaches that had hitherto framed development cooperation (Eggen and Roland, 2013; Rist, 2014). In the 1960s, Hirschman (1967) had already identified the inability of World Bank projects to consider the particularities of context and the hidden difficulties that inevitably affected project processes. Hirschman’s ‘hiding hand’ has a double facet, however: implementers underestimate the difficulties but also their capacity to overcome them. In addition, through his examples, Hirschman stressed the contrasting temporalities of projects

and of context, especially in agricultural interventions, for which he called for longer periods of implementation.

Despite early criticism, projects and programmes (understood as a combination of projects or a large-scale project) continued to frame development interventions. In the chronology of types of development project, large infrastructure projects, including rural development projects, were the norm until the mid-1970s (Eggen and Roland, 2013; Lavigne Delville, 2016). In the 1980s, aid architecture started to move away from this kind of intervention, which primarily reflected a unique and linear development pathway, disregarding the particularities of the host context. In this sense, Brinkerhoff and Ingle (1989) proposed the 'structured flexibility approach', which prioritised iterative learning and accommodated uncertainty in the project framework. The authors acknowledge that their approach might increase a project's complexity, making it a 'daunting and frustrating task' (Brinkerhoff and Ingle, 1989, p.502), but they also note that bringing flexibility to the blueprint raised project performance.

Going further in acknowledging the existing knowledge and resources of the context, Robert Chambers (1983, 2003) contends that most of the solutions that foreign interventions sought could be found in the host context itself through the adoption of rapid rural appraisals and, later, participatory rural appraisals. He argues that the vertical power relations between upper and lower, outsiders and local people, in which interventions are framed, have obstructed consideration of local people's knowledge, and their creative and analytical capabilities (Chambers, 1994, p.963).

Conversely, while some actors have looked at the host context as a source of the success of interventions, others have sought to isolate project from context to avoid misappropriation of project resources (Boone, 1996; Sachs, 1994). As a result, large projects started to disappear at the beginning of the 1990s to give place to smaller projects, which would give less room for local manoeuvre of project inputs. In the context of the projectivisation of aid, the project gained importance as the preferred structure in which to frame development cooperation initiatives, but the mismatch with context remained.

More recently, critiques of projects have accentuated the importance of the mismatch. Ramalingam (2013) suggests that we should embrace context complexity instead of fearing it, because thinking through complexity can help us better understand the world in which we act. Along the same lines, Burns and Worsley (2015, p.18) follow the idea that complexity is not a problem, arguing instead that the problem is that solutions are construed as though

they were not. Hence, the incorporation of complexity within project processes constitutes a way of ensuring interventions can scale up. Also adopting a systemic view, Green (2016, p.240) proposes the Power and System Approach as a solution to ‘making change happen’, by encouraging us ‘to nurture a genuine curiosity about the complex interwoven elements that characterize the systems we are trying to influence’. The adoption of iterative processes is recursive in these emerging approaches. Andrews et al. (2013; 2017) present the Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) as a new approach to doing development. The principle remains the same: to move from the static, foreign-conceived blueprint to home-based problems and solutions; from best practice and institutional mimicry to positive deviance and experimentation (Andrews, 2015). These different but similar approaches meet in their efforts to take foreign intervention closer to the realities of context.

Moving from the practical to the political domain, the critiques of the insufficiencies of projects reached the highest level of aid coordination in the 2000s. This period saw the expansion of the donor community as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) became increasingly present in the aid landscape and became a turning point for the aid effectiveness debate. Fraser and Whitfield (2009) call this period the ‘partnership era’ because it indicates a reframing of aid, as the donor community attempted to move away from power asymmetries and to incorporate new principles into the aid system. Discussions moved from the quantity of aid towards its quality, as donors were invited to look beyond project outcomes and to align project activities with national policies (Rahman and Farin, 2019). In this context, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) organised four high-level fora on aid effectiveness between 2003 and 2011, seeking better results through improved coordination of aid delivery. The topics of the meetings evolved from basic statements about the need for coordination to more concrete guidelines, such as the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (Abdel-Malek, 2015; OECD, 2005), which confirmed the hegemony of results-based management in development cooperation practice. The fourth – and last – high-level forum took place in Busan in 2011 and focussed on partnerships for effective cooperation in the face of the increasing participation of Southern providers and non-state actors in the development cooperation arena (Rahman and Farin, 2019). With regards to project management, the final declaration reiterated the emphasis on accountability, transparency, results, and ownership, but also recognised the diversity of ways of doing development cooperation, involving multiple actors from different sectors (OECD, 2011).

The long-term efforts of practitioners and the donor community to transform the project experience so as to address the project-context mismatch illustrate the difficulty of the task. As a project manager, I have been following these debates and trying to assess my own practice accordingly. I became particularly interested in new methods and alternative frameworks. However, the application of such methods often felt artificial, and the transformation of the project experience became almost as important as whatever was produced by it. By no means do I intend to disregard the project experience or the importance of innovative mechanisms, in particular those that seek to reduce unequal power relations. The project constitutes the space which seems to be most adaptable by implementers and, as such, it needs to overcome hierarchical positions between donors and recipients, guests and hosts. Given this context, the reader will understand my eagerness when I was hired to join the Brazilian Cooperation Agency as a Project Analyst to manage technical cooperation projects in West African countries. South-South cooperation projects promised to be founded on different grounds, away from the colonial legacy and much closer to horizontal power relations.

1.1.3. South-South cooperation and the context-similarity claim

South-South cooperation (SSC), although not a new dynamic in the international arena, is presented as an alternative to the asymmetric power relations that predominate in traditional North-South aid architecture. Southern providers of development cooperation have distinguished their initiatives from North-South aid from the beginning (Gray and Gills, 2016). Such initiatives are guided by the principles of horizontality, mutual benefits, non-interference, non-conditionality, and equality (United Nations, 2010, 2019; UNDP, 1994). Thus, SSC is ‘a manifestation of solidarity among peoples and countries of the South’ (United Nations, 2010, p.2), instead of a type of ‘aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and wellbeing of developing countries’, which is the OECD’s definition of Official Development Assistance (OECD, 2020 n.pag.). As such, Southern countries stress that SSC is ‘not a substitute for, but a complement of North-South cooperation’ (United Nations, 2019 para. 10), and that such initiatives should not reduce the responsibility of developed countries in continuing and increasing development assistance (UNDP, 1994).

In this context, the context-similarity claim, as an element of distinction, emerged progressively, underpinning the texts of the main documents that have framed technical cooperation among developing countries. The Final Communiqué of the Bandung

Conference (1955) stressed common cultural traits between Asian and African cultures, and the Buenos Aires Plan of Action of 1978 focussed on common challenges that developing countries face (UNDP, 1994). Finally, in 1992, the South Commission put it clearly:

South-South co-operation can provide important new opportunities for development based on geographical proximity, on similarities in demand and tastes, on relevance of development experience, know-how, and skills, and on availability of complementary natural and financial resources and management and technical skills. (Nyerere and South Commission, 1992, p.16)

The context-similarity narrative thus became one of the central arguments that sustain and promote SSC initiatives. For example, the ‘cultural affinity’ narrative has been taken up by the Brazilian government since the 1970s, but was re-shaped and accentuated in the 2000s (Abdenur, 2015a, 2015b; Ferreira and Moreira, 2018), followed by similar claims from other emerging donors such as China and India (Arora and Chand, 2015; Chaturvedi and Mohanty, 2016; CISSCA, 2019; GoC, 2006; Xu et al., 2016). The outcome document of the second High-Level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, held in Buenos Aires in 2019, recognises that similar development challenges and proximity of experiences are the ‘key catalysts’ to promoting and emphasising the principles of SSC (United Nations, 2019, p.3).

Such claims circulated as emerging countries became providers and multiplied their initiatives from the 2000s, becoming thereby key actors in the development cooperation arena (Abdenur and Da Fonseca, 2013; Amanor and Chichava, 2016; Eyben, 2012; Eyben and Savage, 2013; Milhorance and Soule-Kohndou, 2017; Quadir, 2013; Woods, 2008). The increasing importance of SSC in the 2000s had an impact even on traditional aid architecture. Thereby, SSC attained the highest levels of ‘aidland’, transforming what was an acquired Northern territory into a paradigmatic battlefield, as such experiences challenged the structured power relations underpinning traditional aid (Esteves and Assunção, 2014; Zoccal Gomes and Esteves, 2018).

However, even though the rhetoric of horizontality and mutual learning, along with shared geographies and a common colonial past, has flowed freely, it is not certain that SSC projects are implemented in such horizontal, innovative ways (Scoones et al., 2016, 2013) that would mean they bridge the project-context mismatch. Shankland and Gonçalves (2016) note that the ‘similarity claim’ takes a political stand in the multilateral fora, but becomes mainly a technical argument to support SSC in practice, especially in the agricultural development field. Cabral et al. (2016) demonstrate that policy concepts shared under the Southern

similarity claim are not immune to re-interpretations and also need to be historically and geographically contextualised. Along these lines, the study of emerging country cooperation in Africa demonstrates that Southern partners do bring new elements to the way programmes are negotiated and implemented, but also many continuities from older experiences (Gray and Gills, 2016; Inoue and Vaz, 2012; Mawdsley, 2012, 2015; Milhorange, 2014; Morvaridi and Hughes, 2018; Scoones et al., 2016, 2013). We still lack ethnographies of South-South projects to understand how SSC operates in the field, and furthermore recent research has challenged the notion of a ‘Southern identity’, arguing that Southern providers tend to reproduce the unequal power relations within development cooperation (Taela, 2017, p.211). In addition, as Cesarino (2013, p.171) demonstrates, a South-South project remains a ‘spatially and temporally circumscribed enterprise’, unable to be fully perpetuated in and be owned by the host context, ‘as if cooperation projects, Northern and Southern alike, are doomed to fail by design’.

From my experience, it seems that the assumption that shared geographies, histories, and experiences are enough to make South-South encounters and projects horizontal and power relations symmetrical has prevented Southern providers from looking thoroughly at projects as political processes and identifying the power asymmetries that inherently predominate in development encounters. It seems that Southern providers have been spending more time distinguishing themselves from traditional donors and signing projects than reflecting on project experiences. For example, when I started working at the Brazilian Cooperation Agency in 2014, a colleague called me ‘too much North-South’ when I expressed surprise at the flexibility with which we extended implementation periods unilaterally, or when I questioned the lack of activity reports. Certainly, many things have changed since the 2000s. Reflections on evaluation mechanisms, accountability, best practice, programmes, and actions, for instance, have recently become a concern in Southern fora (see BRICS Policy Center et al., 2017; Lopes and Costa, 2018; Pomeroy et al., 2017; UNOSSC, 2019; Vazquez, 2013; Waisbich, 2020), while the need for systematising data collection has progressively permeated UN SSC outcome documents as a recommendation (see United Nations, 2019, 2010).

From the analysis above, both project- and context-centred paradigm shifts aiming to reduce the mismatch between projects and contexts seem insufficient to enable projects to overcome coloniality and a mismatch with the host context. In the next section, I turn to the host context perspective to further understand project processes, be they North-South or South-South.

1.1.4. Swapping perspectives: Seeing development cooperation from the context perspective

In development cooperation host contexts, particular attention is given to the role of the state, which seems never to match the expectations of the international community. As discussed in the section above, development discourse and practice have placed developing countries on a linear path of change towards the Western model. From this perspective, the state plays a significant role in administering development change by coordinating, orienting, and governing institutions, and in establishing the rules for resource allocation and distribution. Leftwich (2000, p.7) suggests that we see this process as political, because it involves ‘new ways in which all manner of resources – both internal and external – are mobilized, directed and deployed’. Given this, the study of the state in sub-Saharan Africa has placed the experiences of countries along a linear continuum of institutional development, based on experiences which exclude Africa (Bayart, 1993, p.5). Alternatively, Mbembe (2001, p.36) suggests that one should not look simply at the reason and strength of the state, but at the relations of subjection for which ‘it is important to go beyond the fashionable slogans of traditional political science (soft state, strong state, patrimonial state, etc.) and to think about how the state sought to augment its value and manage utilities’. The main idea surrounding these arguments is that the African state is the result of a process of assimilation and adaptation of a foreign model of societal organisation (Banégas, 2003; Mamdani, 1996; Mbembe, 2001). In this respect, Bayart (1993, p.260) suggests that the ‘transfer of representations, attitudes and cultural models follows patterns of creative derivation’, which give to African states their own historicity, so the African state can no longer be taken as purely exogenous. This implies that the state is founded on particular bases, unique to each country, that do not fit into Western-oriented political frameworks. Thus, it is not surprising that development projects which are generic models based on international best practice or on ‘institutional monocropping’ are likely to prove inappropriate and ineffective (Booth and Cammack, 2013, p.10), since they tend to disregard the specific features and interests of local politics.

In an attempt to pay more attention to small-scale processes and unique experiences, Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan suggest studying the “real” works of states and public bureaucracies in different African countries’ (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2014, p.3; Bierschenk, 2014). At that scale of analysis, it is possible to distinguish islands of effectiveness within the state apparatus and the effect of the recurrence of development projects in the public administration (Aubert, 2014; Blundo, 2011), where agents function as the thread

between the temporary and specific interventions, on one hand, and the enduring practices of the state, on the other. With regards to development projects, Olivier de Sardan (1988, p.219) argues that because interventions took place in almost every African village, there is a 'memory of such interventions among peasants, more so than among 'developers' who very often act as if they were debarking on virgin territory'. From the perspective of the host context, Olivier de Sardan sees development projects as 'travelling models', or as a 'standardised institutional intervention that aims to produce social change', in which de-contextualisation is a central element (Olivier de Sardan, 2021, pp.26–36).

Accordingly, such harmonisation of models of intervention and disconnection with the context requires networking. The concepts of development brokers (Bierschenk et al., 2002; Mosse and Lewis, 2006), as mediators between project and context, and of boundary partners, those who take part in project activities and whom implementers identify as key influencers outside the project boundaries (Earl et al., 2001), are particularly important in this research. In the same vein, Mosse and Lewis' (2006, p.16) take on development brokers focusses on how actors buying into policy models – including those development projects provide – allows them to be part of their own social and political trajectories. Thereby, the configuration or re-configuration of enduring institutional arrangements remain subject to adaptation and interpretation by local actors, especially local elites (Booth and Cammack, 2013, p.138; Crewe and Harrison, 2002), who influence the rules and govern the distribution of resources.

From this perspective, development cooperation projects become almost insignificant as drivers of change, for being incompatible, or too short, too specific. Development anthropologists have critically observed the limitations of projects and the importance of the host context (Crewe and Harrison, 2002; Bierschenk et al., 1991; Ferguson, 2007; Li, 2007; Mosse, 2005, among others). Eyben (2014, p.101) argues that we have always known that projects fail, because 'however well designed, it may not be possible for a project to effect some radical transformation without changes to the broader context'. In other words, projects are too simple and too linear when compared to the problems they aim to solve and to the contexts in which they are implemented.

Along these lines, Mosse (2005, 2004, 1998) suggests that different views of development have hindered a deeper understanding of project implementation and processes. Not only are projects unable to read context, but researchers and practitioners also fail in understanding the project itself. Seeing the development project as a process enables thinkers

and practitioners to consider the complexity and unpredictability of planned interventions. As Crehan and van Oppen (1988) suggest, a project is a 'social event' which necessarily has unpredictable effects. It is less a matter of whether a project works or not, is good or bad, succeeds or fails, than an exploration of whatever is made with project components (resources, arrangements, relationships, practices), by whom and why.

This implies that project components are permeable and prone to be manipulated by host actors. Crehan and von Oppen (1988) examine how farmers, as project recipients, can succeed in readjusting objectives according to their own interests, because a project constitutes an arena of struggle in which the agency of foreign interveners can be contested. It is questionable, therefore, to talk about project failure, since there are winners in every project (Crewe and Harrison, 2002; Elwert and Bierschenk, 1988; Mosse, 2005).

Ferguson (2007) demonstrates that project components can be re-interpreted and used to reproduce established power structures in the host context. Hence, the failure of a project is not accidental, because the political machine of the host context processes all inputs to its own benefit. In this sense, the complex political dynamics of the local context are independent from simple and temporary interventions, such as development projects. This perspective raises the question of who benefits from projects, in the end. It is not that projects have no effect on local hierarchies, but that they reinforce them (Amselle, 1988). While Ferguson demonstrates that the interests of the host context prevail, he also suggests that development projects, by being disconnected from the host context, seem to seek to benefit themselves and their own objectives, through their own resources. In this sense, Amselle (1988) suggests that the real failure is not in the project itself, but in the contradiction between the devised objectives of projects and their real effects.

In sum, the perspectives above elaborate on the duality between project and host context, in which neither is insignificant nor hegemonic within project processes. Instead, there seems to be a complex interplay in which one constructs the other. This is particularly interesting in contexts that have been hosting projects for many years and which have left their mark. It is the project-context interplay through time that I investigate in this thesis. To put it differently, I go from what a project is to how it came to be. In the next section, I state the aim and scope of this research.

1.2. Research aim and scope: Cotton development projects in Benin

During my learning journey, I explored different perspectives on the development encounter. These perspectives oscillated between a strong focus on either structure or agency, which I could translate into an oscillation between views in which development cooperation projects are either dominant or insignificant elements in the historical trajectories of developing countries. On one hand – the structuralist perspective – development cooperation responds to the interests of developed countries and forcibly places other countries in a subaltern position in a linear path of change, as though host actors had no agency. On the other hand, development projects – development's main tool of dissemination – are too short and specific to weigh against the agency of agents in the host context.

These shifts of perspective led me to think of the project as a dinner party, when time and space are distinguishable from how they are in everyday dinners. Having dinner is an everyday practice that is constructed through time. Our way of preparing and having dinner stems from our past experiences, hence it is the product of the accumulation of similar experiences in our life trajectories. When we prepare dinner, we have our own habits, possibilities, constraints, and resources (both material and human). For instance, we might need different kitchenware; others might use help, others not. There are also certain social rules, such as the time at which dinner is eaten and dining etiquette, which differ from one country to another. Yet every day we have dinner according to the possibilities that our rules and resources provide us. This is our host context and enduring practices.

One day, however, we host a dinner party, and the rules and resources change for one evening. For the sake of the analogy, let us consider that for this dinner party a friend of ours has proposed to teach us a special dish that will, according to them, enable us to improve our diet, and ultimately our health. On this occasion, distinct rules and resources are imposed. The external cook is bringing their own kitchenware, and they might even bring special and exotic ingredients to enrich the dish. The rules also change for one night. For instance, all invitees need to participate, either in cleaning the dishes, chopping vegetables, or assisting the cook. We, the hosts, must comply with these rules for the successful 'implementation' of the dinner party. The dinner party is a development project.

At the end of the day, the dinner party, as an isolated event, is successfully implemented. The food was tasty and nutritious; it accomplished the task of providing a balanced meal to all invitees, and everyone enjoyed and valued the dishes that we all prepared together. The next

day, however, we go back to our everyday practice, shaped by the arrangements, rules, and resources that prevail in our host context. We still need to have dinner, although, after having tasted some new recipes, we would like to change our everyday menu. However, the cook is no longer there. They have left some of the kitchenware they brought, but we are unable to have such a feast again due to a lack of resources, our time constraints, and our own social arrangements. Additionally, because we all play different roles in our household, some of us are more prone to replicate the practices that we learnt, while others might even be able to decide whether or not it is worthwhile to incorporate them as an everyday practice and to reallocate resources accordingly.

Just like dinner parties, development projects consist of ad hoc, extraordinary experiences that contrast with the prevailing rules and resources of the host (country). The aim of a project, in addition, is to make this extraordinary experience become ordinary (sustainability) and to scale it up to other households – expecting a single evening to shape years of accumulated practices in preparing dinner. Yet even though dinner parties are brief, specific, and extraordinary events, they still represent life experiences from which we can draw elements to shape the way we do things. Ad hoc experiences become an ingredient in a repertoire of dispositions that we piece together to construct our overall practice.

Therefore, instead of discarding either perspective completely, it is the interplay between projects and context, dinner parties and everyday dinner, that interests me in this research. This presupposes that the agency of projects in context and the agency of the context within projects are not predetermined or fixed; instead, they are constantly changing and possibly changing each other. It requires the adoption of a historical perspective which cannot be the project's, due to the limited temporality of the latter. It comes to locating project footprints in life trajectories, institutional arrangements, and enduring practices that transcend the spaces and times of projects, in order to understand how host actors' agency is constructed, including to what extent it stems from project experiences. In sum, the aim of my research is to investigate the progressive construction of agency within both projects and host context. This thesis seeks to answer the following main question and sub-questions:

How does the host context come to incorporate ad hoc development project arrangements into enduring institutions?

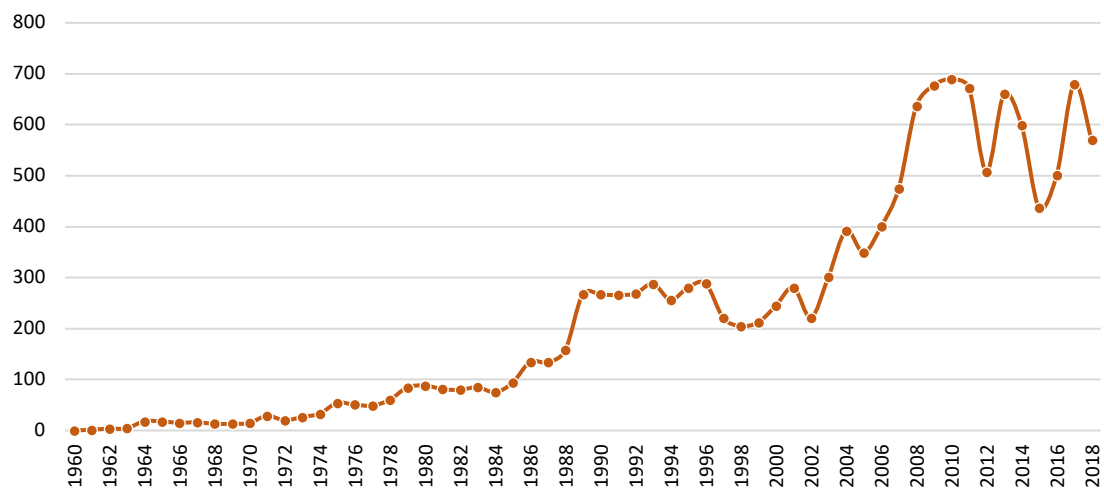
- How different are ad hoc development cooperation arrangements within the host context?
- How do experiences in development projects shape subsequent development encounters?

- How are ad hoc development cooperation arrangements navigated across social fields?

I approach these questions using key concepts from social theory, which provide a theoretical background for understanding the relationship between institutions and practices, structure and agents, as each influences the other. I present the conceptual framework of this research in the next chapter.

The focus of this research is on the history of development encounters in the cotton sector in Benin since independence from French colonial rule in 1960. The history of development cooperation in Benin has not yet been compiled as such – and especially not from the perspective of the host country. Since independence in 1960, Benin has been receiving foreign assistance from various European countries and international organisations (European Union, 2012). We can observe in the chart below (figure 1) that the fluctuations correspond to both national events (e.g. the adoption of structural adjustment plans in 1989 and the subsequent democratic transition and privatisations from 1990) and external factors (e.g. the boom in development assistance in the post-9/11 era and its decrease from 2009 as a consequence of the 2008 financial crisis).

Figure 1: Net Official Development Assistance¹ received by Benin per year from 1960 to 2018 (in millions of current USD)



Source: (World Bank, 2020)

The structural adjustment plans (SAP), adopted from 1989 in Benin, have left a mark on the country's economy and on the relationships between foreign donors and national elites (Van

¹ Includes grants and loans from OECD-DAC countries, multilateral organisations, and non-DAC countries.

de Walle, 2001), emphasising foreign interference and increasing the dependency on foreign assistance (Lavigne Delville, 2010; Whitfield and Fraser, 2010). Gazibo (2005, p.78) demonstrates how the success of the Beninese democratic transition improved Benin's ability to attract external financial support, because 'the country responded quickly and decisively to the donors' and international financial institutions' new paradigms of democratic conditionality and good governance'. The good timing of the transition and the good sequencing of economic and political reforms produced willingness on the part of donors to remain committed (Gazibo, 2005, p.79). In turn, this might have had an impact on how Beninese actors experienced development cooperation projects and on how they engage with and participate in these arenas of struggle.

Rural development, specifically, has been on the agenda of the main donors and international organisations in Benin since independence. Agricultural development has progressed through the different paradigms of aid as a key sector of development, especially for the relative importance of the rural population in developing countries in general and the increasing disparities between urban and rural areas (Ellis and Biggs, 2001). Structural reforms in the agricultural sector have appeared in every memorandum between Benin and the International Monetary Fund since the 1990s. By then, 'sustainable agriculture' had gained momentum in the context of a post-green revolution and the Brundtland report (Conway and Barbier, 1990).

Against this background, there has been a multiplication of rural development projects being implemented in Benin.² Almost all of these projects had a focus on the cotton sector, the importance of which in the Beninese economy is repeatedly highlighted for its contribution to export revenues³ and for having replaced palm oil and derivate products as the preferred cash crop for small farmers since the 1960s (IDA, 1972). As we will see in chapter 3, different waves of cotton projects have succeeded one another, having a variable and complex interplay within a changing host context.

1.3. Overview of the study

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. In the next chapter, I detail the concepts and methods used in my research. The conceptual framework revolves around the interplay

² See database of World Bank projects in Benin:

http://projects.banquemondiale.org/search?lang=fr&searchTerm=&countrycode_exact=BJ.

³ See Letters of Intents from Benin to the IMF:

<http://www.imf.org/external/country/ben/index.htm?type=9998>.

between projects and the host context through institutions as mediators of the interplay between agency and structure, and power as a prism that directs which arrangements prevail. From this framework, I move to the methods I adopted. I describe my first encounter with Benin and how I came to study its cotton sector. Then, I turn to an outline of my research strategy, the definition of the boundaries of my research, and the impact that my fieldwork experience had on those choices. I also describe my experience of conducting field research in Benin and reflect on potential bias in my research and on my positionality. Finally, I conclude chapter 2 by describing how I pieced together the data I collected, which implied the continued development of the conceptual framework and expansion of the literature.

In chapter 3, I provide the background to this research, as I describe the historical constitution of the cotton sector in Benin. This chapter presents the actors in the cotton sector, from the coloniser to the national private elite, and the power relations between them in regards to control of the sector. Projects are also part of this process and I also identify them within this trajectory. I draw from a variety of sources, ranging from the history and politics bodies of literature, news articles, project documents, and other information from primary sources. Given the background already outlined, I move to the study of the footprints of cotton development cooperation projects in the host context.

I begin chapter 4 by describing the life trajectories of different key informants. By doing this I aim to locate project experiences in their life paths and bring up the different perspectives on development cooperation from the host context. I share the perspectives of a farmer, an extension agent, a cotton researcher, and a coordinator from the Interprofessional Cotton Association (AIC), collected through multiple in-depth interviews during field research. Their perspectives bring up the distinctions in project arrangements, relationships, processes, and practices in the host context. In the second section of this chapter, I depict the innate characteristics of project arrangements that make projects an asset in the host context (their rules and resources, for instance), while also limiting their ability to make an impact, because of their short-lived and exclusive nature.

From the distinctions between project arrangements, I move to the historical journey of the constitution of development projects as an enduring institution, in chapter 5. I show that early projects introduced then regularised development cooperation practices that endured within subsequent development projects. The recurrence of cotton projects created a tradition of development cooperation, with rules taken for granted and expectations for subsequent encounters. This refers to the effects of projects in the host context that appear

in subsequent projects. The arrival of Southern providers of cotton projects in the late 2000s involved an encounter between traditional aid and SSC paradigms in the host context. The outcomes of this encounter illustrate the institutionalisation of development practice and indicate possibilities for and obstacles to change.

In chapter 6, I turn to the effects of projects in national institutions of the cotton sector. I revisit the historical trajectory of cotton projects, but with a focus on the project components that were incorporated into national institutions and that endured over time. Put differently, the chapter's focus is on the effects of projects outside project spaces. I start the chapter with an analysis of the role of early cotton projects in a nascent cotton sector. In that section, I take the example of cotton research, one of the main recipients of cotton projects since the 1960s. I then show the evolution of the role of projects, through liberalisation and the multiplication of partners and projects from the 2000s. I conclude the chapter by exploring how project components are incorporated into the host context within the current organisational and functional mechanisms.

I discuss my findings in chapter 7 to shed light on the evolution of the role and weight of projects in the host context, across time and host actors. That perspective on the interplay between projects and context enables me to identify the conditions through which projects shape context and vice-versa. Finally, I conclude this thesis in chapter 8 by reframing the discussion around the concept of institutional bricolage and reflecting on the insights afforded to the debate on development cooperation paradigms and practice, and the contributions of this research to a different way of looking at projects and their incremental and combined effects.

CHAPTER 2. DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION COMPONENTS IN INSTITUTIONAL BRICOLAGE: THEORY AND METHODS

At the time of writing my research proposal, my initial idea was to study the influence of local elites within project processes – here simply understood as a sequence of actions. I was convinced of the role of elites in shaping policies and institutions, and in allocating resources according to their interests. Conversely, while elites seemed to shape development pathways, I was implementing projects that sometimes seemed to diverge from the interests of powerful groups, running sometimes implicitly behind the project stage. Reflecting on project sustainability, I wondered how we could succeed in such circumstances. I started sketching some ideas that I wrote down during a workshop I was co-facilitating in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. We were in a closed room, but I could not help looking out through the window and seeing the contrast between what I saw outside and what we were saying and doing inside. There was a mismatch. It seemed that the room, improvised in an adapted container, was isolated in space, like an island, cut off from the outside world, its actors, interests, rules, and resources. Yet I was convinced that the solid wall of the real room was thicker than the figurative blurred boundary that separated the space of development cooperation and the host context. I wrote down my first questions: how do elite interests permeate project spaces? What do they take from them?

During the first year of the PhD programme at IDS, two main points emerged and became pillars of my research. First, I was encouraged to look beyond elites. There are other groups of actors who navigate across project spaces and between projects and the host context. By doing so, those actors might also work as brokers between project and context. I came to look at power as relational, taking different configurations in different spaces. I came to look at project hosts, including local project staff, experts, and participants at large. As projects implement activities that overlap with practices that exist outside the project space, any participant would be able to take something ‘from here to there’. Thus, institutional bricolage emerged as a concept through which to understand the interplay between project and context.

Second, as I opposed the ‘time of projects’ to the ‘time of the context’, I needed a historical perspective. This would support me in demonstrating the contrasting temporalities of projects (relatively short and specific) and of context (undetermined and infinite), and the role of ‘brokers’ – or of bricoleurs, as we shall see – from one project to another, from project to context, and from context to project. Going almost in the opposite direction, I also wanted to incorporate the idea of continuity. Although a project is short in time, projects, as an

ensemble, are inserted into a continuum and connected to each other throughout history. Indeed, a project is linked to previous projects, and it is the hosts who connect them as they navigate from one to the other in the host context. In this research I attempt to address the tension between the temporality of a project, of projects, and of the context, as I explain in the next sub-sections.

Subsequently, I faced the question of how to distinguish ‘project’ from ‘context’. My supervisors and I agreed that projects introduced arrangements, relationships, and practices that were different from the part of the context that endured after the end of the implementation. Yet projects were part of the context and could not be completely disentangled from it – they also endured, because one project succeeds another. Hence, I could not simply use ‘context’ to speak of those spaces outside a project’s framework; I needed an adjective for the everyday life of context ‘minus’ projects. We dropped ‘permanent context’ very quickly. It was an easy choice as the main antonym for ‘temporary’ or ‘intermittent’, which characterise project spaces. However, it sounds static, or something that does not change. This would give the wrong idea by insinuating that context is immutable, independent of projects. I also attempted the use of project versus ordinary arrangements, as the literature on organisational studies suggests (see for example Lundin and Steinhórrsson, 2003, p.245). However, this choice would neutralise the power relations between projects and host context arrangements that I aim to capture. At last, I found comfort with ‘prevailing’, ‘enduring’, and finally ‘host context’. In the writing phase, I decided to keep these three adjectives, but I use them distinctively. The host context is Benin and its cotton sector in its condition as project host; this is the beneficiary or partner. ‘Enduring’ and ‘prevailing’ I use to characterise the institutions, arrangements, relationships, processes, and practices of the host context. Enduring institutions include projects as an ensemble, as well as the other institutions that prevail in the host context – for example, cotton research. Prevailing institutions are the enduring institutions ‘minus’ projects, because their arrangements prevail over and above the temporary and specific arrangements of projects. Given this background, in the next sub-sections I develop the concepts that frame my research and the methods I adopted.

2.1. Project ‘ad hocness’, institutional bricolage, and power

In this section, I analyse the concepts that I have adopted in this research. There are three main ideas that I use to approach the interplay between projects and context over time. The ‘ad hocness’ of project institutional arrangements refers to the contrasting temporalities of

project and context. The concept of institutional bricolage provides a frame within which to approach the interactions between different institutional settings, along with institutional building and change. Finally, these processes are shaped by power relations within and outside projects, and between projects and the host context.

2.1.2. Development projects as ad hoc institutions

This research builds upon the idea of the mismatch between project and host context. The idea comes from the observation that projects enable arrangements, relationships, and practices that would not exist in the host context without the project. In this sense, projects function as institutions, as they mediate the duality between structure and agency by providing rules and resources that enable and constrain human action.

Therefore, the emphasis is less on the supremacy of either structure or agency in shaping action. Rather, I follow Giddens's (1984) structuration theory, which suggests that structure and agency are both products and producers of one other, thus reproducing sets of rules and resources and patterns of social life. Giddens's duality of structure also relates to Bourdieu's (2005, p.82) 'dialectic of internalisation of externality, and externalisation of internality', in which structures are the product of history, but also produce and shape practices, and hence history again. By mediating the structure-agency duality and functioning as an institution, projects constitute one of the channels through which one's practices construct a structure, and, simultaneously, a structure guides one's practices.

Institutional theories provide many insights into how institutions mediate the interplay between structure and agency (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Lowndes, 2010). As institutionalists drew from sociology, anthropology, and law, the definition of 'institution' challenged earlier approaches that saw institutions mainly as the 'rules of the game in a society that shape human interaction' (North, 1992, p.3). Emerging views aimed to move away from this static definition to encapsulate the complexities, uncertainties, and context particularities, as well as to incorporate power into the analysis (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Lowndes, 2010). The contributions in the literature on natural resource management are particularly relevant to this research. Leach et al. (1999, p.237), for example, define institutions 'not as rules themselves, but as patterns of behaviours that emerge from underlying structures or 'sets of rules' in use'. From this view there is a focus on social interaction and processes going beyond the formal-informal and local-global binaries (Mehta et al., 2001).

The recursiveness of patterns of behaviour over time is a fundamental characteristic of institutions (Mahoney and Thelen, 2009). Institutions are constituted by ‘regularized practices performed over time’ (Leach et al., 1999, p.238). Giddens (1984, p.24) also characterises institutions as ‘the more enduring features of social life’, which give solidity to social systems across time and space. As both product and producer of history, institutions enable and constrain practice. Also giving a particular weight to history and past experiences, Bourdieu’s (1990, 2005) habitus is ‘embodied history’, a system of transposable dispositions construed by past experiences that structure one’s practice.

The long life of institutions being a necessary condition of their existence presupposes that development cooperation projects, which are limited in time, cannot be considered institutions per se. Indeed, a single project is too short-lived to create patterns of social behaviour. They do provide and organise times and spaces within which arrangements shape relationships and practices, and distribute power among stakeholders, enabling and constraining agency, but these do not last long enough beyond the project time frame to become a pattern. Such is the inherent temporary characteristic of projects.

However, development cooperation projects, as an ensemble, have a long history of at least sixty years. Therefore, ‘current projects take place in a milieu that has already experienced previous interventions that have left their mark’, and they structure, at least in part, current behaviours (Olivier de Sardan, 2005, p.139), as ‘a constitutive phenomenon of the historicity of African societies and political regimes’ (Blundo, 2011, p.1). Hence, although each project differs from another, there are regularised practices in development encounters that can be observed from the early years of aid to the present – as I demonstrate in subsequent chapters. In this sense, in which development projects are seen as an ensemble, they constitute a type of institution, with particular practices, defined actors and roles, relationships, processes, and power relations that have endured over time. Thus there is as much continuity as discontinuity in development project institutions. Projects are intermittent and constant, according to the scale of time and analysis one adopts. Hence, I adopted the adjective *ad hoc* to reflect this contradiction when characterising development cooperation institutions. Thus, ‘ad hoc institutions’ aims to acknowledge the temporary nature of each project alongside the idea that each of them is part of a broader history of development encounters, in which patterns of arrangements, relationships, processes, and practices have eventually been constituted.

Going further, the identification and distinction of development cooperation institutional arrangements assume the co-existence of multiple institutions in the host context. In this sense, institutionalist approaches have drawn from scholarship on law to adopt, first, the idea of legal pluralism (the existence of multiple legal frameworks), then that of ‘institutional multiplicity’, which focusses more on the interplay among different institutional settings (Hesselbein et al., 2006; Goodfellow and Lindemann, 2013). This concept is applied to understanding how actors navigate sets of rules in which the distribution of power and power relations differ (Mehta et al., 2001, 1999; Leach et al., 1999). In turn, this implies a move towards actor-oriented approaches (Long, 1992, 2001). Long sees projects as arenas or social encounters in which ‘contests over issues, resources, values, and representations take place’ (Long, 2000, p.192). Such perspectives enable us to observe actors’ agency in different institutional settings, indicating the different possibilities and constraints of different spaces. More interestingly, an ‘interface analysis’, by following actors’ interactions within different locales, enables an understanding of the interplay between institutions and social spaces (Beck, 2016; Long, 1992). This is particularly interesting for approaching the possibilities of institutional change.

With regards to change, Giddens’ structuration theory and Bourdieusian approaches tend to be deterministic, at least at first sight. Both authors emphasise the submission of current practices to past experiences, as though agents were locked in a rigid structure of institutions. Nevertheless, despite suggestions to the contrary, Bourdieu’s theory of practice incorporates possibilities of change (see Schlerka, 2018, for example). Although one’s *habitus* tends to ensure its own consistency and its defence against change that might call it into question (Bourdieu, 1990, pp.60–61), this does not imply that our practices are immune to change. Rather, Bourdieu (2000, p.161) suggests that the ‘habitus changes constantly in response to new experiences... and dispositions [which constitute the habitus] are subject to a kind of permanent revision’ – even though such changes are never radical. According to Giddens (1984, p.3), a continuity of patterns of behaviour presumes reflexivity and monitoring of actions, which in turn is only possible because of a continuity of practices. It is specifically because there is a pattern over time that agents are able to reflect upon their and other agents’ actions, monitoring consistency, ensuring continuity, but also opening possibilities for social change (Giddens, 1984, p.245). Building on these ideas, the study of institutions moved away from structuralism and determinism to more dynamic approaches, focussing on practices as they shape institutions and social structures. This implies, nonetheless, that institutional change deriving from changes in behaviours is slow and ‘path-dependent’ (Hall and Taylor,

1996; Leach et al., 1999), but not necessarily a rational process, and subject to interpretation and re-interpretation (Hall, 2009; Mahoney and Thelen, 2009).

The concepts presented above contribute to approach projects as institutions. Other overlapping concepts also see a project as a particular social space where resources, meanings, values, and ideas are at stake, spaces in which host actors engage, unpack and re-use elements and resources, and transform. In this research, I focus less on the interactions within a specific type of social arena or encounter, and more on the relations between different institutional settings or social spaces, namely between project and host context. By doing so, I connect the co-existence of multiple institutions to how institutional change is envisaged. As actors navigate across institutional settings, they collect experiences and build a repertoire of dispositions that structures their practices. This repertoire of dispositions provides them with tools to react to everyday challenges in multiple institutional settings. Experiences in development projects are one of these sources of dispositions (also referred to as institutional components), which actors can use in subsequent projects or in other domains of action. As they assemble the pieces, they perform ‘institutional bricolage’. In the next sub-section, I discuss how I apply this concept in my research.

2.1.3. Institutional bricolage: Piecing together institutional arrangements

In this research, the concept of ‘institutional bricolage’ serves to shed light on the use of project components in other institutional settings and in subsequent projects – or how, in this process, such components go from ad hoc to durable. Cleaver (2001, 2012) takes further Douglas’ concept of institutional thinking, in turn based on Lévi-Strauss’s idea of intellectual bricolage. For Lévi-Strauss, intellectual bricolage characterises primitive thought, but Douglas (2011, pp.65–66) argues that the assembling of pieces is an important stage of institution building in modern societies as well. From this perspective, critical institutionalism sees institutional bricolage as a more conscious process in both institution building and institutional functioning. Cleaver and de Koning (2015, p.4) define institutional bricolage as the ‘process through which people, consciously and non-consciously, assemble or reshape institutional arrangements, drawing on whatever materials and resources are available, regardless of their original purpose’. This concept has been adopted and developed in research on natural resource management; I believe it can also contribute to understanding the weight of projects in host contexts.

Cleaver identifies five key elements of bricolage (see Cleaver, 2012, pp.45–50). First, there is a focus on the necessary improvisation and innovation of everyday practice. As people react to everyday challenges by combining institutional arrangements sourced from different institutions, the resulting practice is a ‘patchwork’, a mosaic of arrangements that make sense in that particular situation. As I consider past and present development projects as sources of institutional arrangements, I am interested in exploring which project pieces are being re-used and reworked by bricoleurs in the cotton sector in Benin.

Second, institutional bricolage assumes that those pieces are multi-purpose, since they can be used in multiple institutional settings. This stays valid even if such arrangements were made to work under a specific institutional setting, such as a development project. As an arrangement becomes part of the repertoire of dispositions, the bricoleur is able to unpack, re-shape, and re-interpret it, and give it a different purpose in a different social space. This element of bricolage addresses what might be perceived as the diversion of project resources by host actors, who might give a different purpose to project institutional components, away from project objectives. While some researchers and practitioners see it as a factor of project failure (as discussed in chapter 1), it becomes bricolage within a critical institutionalist approach. Bricolage sees the multi-purpose application of arrangements as a method of cooperation among institutions, as bricoleurs borrow components from one institutional setting and apply them in another. From this perspective, the focus is on the complexity of the host context. It provides a different way to approach the apparent messiness of institutional functioning and sheds light on the effectiveness of improvisational use of what is available (Bruns, 2009).

Third, Cleaver insists on the weight of meanings and traditions in the process of piecing together institutional arrangements. As bricoleurs piece together old and new to make something different, this ‘must appear familiar, it must work on a routinely accepted logic, it must socially fit’ (Cleaver, 2012, p.47). Hence, bricolage is mainly path-dependent, as bricoleurs draw from previous experiences and pre-existing ways of doing things. This element is important as it represents the idea of the mismatch between the project and the host context. It appears that project components that contrast with traditional practices would be less likely to be pieced together later on, outside the project structure. Additionally, this means that the ‘innovations adopted are in fact often adopted for reasons other than those foreseen by the experts’ (Olivier de Sardan, 1988, p.222).

Institutional bricolage also implies that meanings and traditions ‘leak’ from one institution to another. Cleaver (2001, p.32) explains the ‘leakage of meaning’ with the example of a caretaker in Uganda who borrowed beliefs from another ethnic group and whose rituals appeared to become a multi-ethnic institution. Cleaver also gives the example of local authorities who borrowed state bureaucratic titles to reinforce their legitimacy over water use management. Taking it further, de Koning (2011) argues that when the leakage of meaning is persistent and recurring, this can start a process of alteration in socially embedded institutions, since meanings and traditions are re-interpreted, and new ones emerge. In this process, development brokers play an important role in translating arrangements between institutional settings. However, whereas this role was first defined as requiring certain types of competency, such as rhetorical, organisational, and relational, and referred primarily to local development professionals (Bierschenk et al., 2002), I consider every bricoleur (or project participant) as a broker, since agents are constantly navigating different institutional settings, and combining and re-interpreting arrangements.

As a consequence, the arrangements produced through bricolage become natural, as a patchwork of arrangements that share common broader meanings and traditions. In turn, this entails that the process of bricolage is both conscious and unconscious, which is its fourth key element. Cleaver (2012, p.49) notes that a multitude of factors (from gender to spatial location, wealth, and aspirations) will have a bearing on the ways that bricoleurs shape and engage with institutions. Consequently, institutional design and change involves repeating and questioning previous patterns, though they are rarely unquestionably kept the same or completely rejected.

Finally, the fifth key element of bricolage acknowledges that bricoleurs have different constraints and opportunities in piecing together institutional arrangements. Hence, institutional bricolage ‘is an authoritative process, shaped by relations of power’ (Cleaver, 2012, p.49). This addresses the gaps found within earlier institutionalist studies with regards to power analyses within institutional functioning. The social positions of bricoleurs determine their ability to shape institutions, to allocate resources, and to impose moral world views. This ensures that the resulting arrangements reflect the interests of powerful groups. The latter are also concerned about ‘consolidating their interests across different domains of action’ (Cleaver and Whaley, 2018, p.10) – across different institutional settings, for example, within and outside project structures. Thus, existing power structures influence institutional building and functioning, making bricolage a way of reproducing inequalities in different institutional settings (Cleaver and Whaley, 2018; Cleaver, 2012). This affects the desired

outcome of those development interventions that seek to mitigate power asymmetries in the host context. For example, interventions intending to work with smallholder farmers might benefit the heads of small cooperatives, who are, by definition, the biggest farmers among the members. Institutional bricolage also pays attention to the ways through which invisible power hinders the ability of bricoleurs to contest prevailing structures. In the next subsection, I develop further how I conceptualise power in this research.

Within this framework, I study how arrangements produced by projects are borrowed in two domains of action: in subsequent projects, and in other institutional settings in the prevailing context. In other words, the recurrence of project components beyond a project's framework signifies the passage from ad hoc to durable. When bricoleurs borrow components from past projects in subsequent ones, they enable the building and reproduction of ad hoc development cooperation institutions. When they borrow components to act in other institutional settings of the host context, the project becomes part of the building and functioning of other institutions existing in the host context. It is the reappearance of ad hoc project institutional arrangements in other spheres of action that makes them durable.

By project components (or pieces to be assembled by bricoleurs), I refer to arrangements, relationships, processes, and practices. As Olivier de Sardan (1988) suggests, the project is not only a technical package being offered, but also an organisation that proposes it, hence should be studied as such. This implies that, beyond the package, the project also introduces to the host context patterns of relationships and behaviour that are equally prone to be unpacked by hosts. Thus, arrangements are the ways in which projects enable participants to access resources and facilities which, in turn, enable practices. For example, the ways farmers access agrochemicals, agricultural material, and other resources. Relationships are how people interact: the patterns of social interaction within project spaces and that might be reproduced outside the project framework. On this point I focus, for example, on the kind of relationships between trainer and trainee, expert and beneficiary, farmer and administrator, and so on. Consecutively, relationships shape practices and processes. Simply put, processes are a series of actions or practices. Practices are the ways in which people do things, the technique farmers adopt to farm cotton (sow, plough, harvest), to deliver training, to conduct field visits, and so on.

A project introduces into the context components that bricoleurs might borrow afterwards in later projects and outside the spaces of development cooperation – thereby going from ad hoc to durable. As mentioned above, the movement from ad hoc to durable through

bricolage is shaped by power relations within and outside projects, and between projects and the host context.

2.1.4. Power relations from ad hoc to durable

Bricolage as a process is a result of the power relations that govern social interaction in a given social space. Bourdieu provides a useful conceptualisation of power that can help us to understand how agency is construed differently in different spaces. For Bourdieu, one's capacity to respond to the constraints and solicitations of one's milieu is guided by the way society becomes embodied in forms of capacity and of structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways – this is one's habitus (Wacquant, 2011, p.319). Practice is thus an unconscious process, meaning that agents might also act in favour of their powerlessness because of the naturalisation of domination through a process that Bourdieu calls 'misrecognition', to describe 'why individuals are sometimes not aware of their own subordination to powerful agents' (Navarro, 2006, p.14). In these conditions, power for Bourdieu is relational and contingent to a specific social space (or field, in his theory) and moment in time. In other words, social spaces (a concept that I connect with social fields, arenas of struggle, social encounters, or locales, from different authors) have different power configurations, which in turn configure meanings, arrangements, relationships, and practices that might transfer to other spaces. There are three main elements related to power that are particularly important in this research: power is relational and specific to each social field; social fields are permeable among themselves and influence each other; social fields and habitus change through time. In the next paragraphs, I detail the application of each of these elements in this thesis.

A social field, according to Bourdieu, consists of a social space structured according to power relations, objects of struggle, and rules that are taken for granted (Pouliot and Mérand, 2013). Thus, inasmuch as the recursiveness of development cooperation projects means they constitute institution, development cooperation also constitutes a social field, in Bourdieu's terms, with actors positioned in the field according to the capital they possess, the rules that are taken for granted, and regularised practices (see Esteves and Assunção, 2014; Zoccal, 2018). This approach sheds light on the positions of dominant and subaltern, or donor and recipient, that characterise aid and international development cooperation interventions. Alongside the consolidation of the field as such, meanings and rules become taken for granted, and so do the resulting practices, which become natural, unquestioned, and 'traditional'.

Such an approach to power also acknowledges that the distribution of power differs across social fields, meaning that certain actors might be powerful in some fields but not in others (Gaventa, 2003, p.9), or might resist domination in one and express complicity in others (Moncrieffe, 2006, p.37). This means that the power relations within the international development field, materialised through projects, are different from the power relations in other social fields in which host actors navigate, as each field has its own rules, objects of struggle, and regularised practices, or a practical sense. Thus, actors' capacity to act varies across fields. In this sense, as Bigo (2011) argues, the study of a field cannot be disconnected from the specific practices it enables. Wacquant (2016, p.66) explains that Bourdieu's habitus encapsulates a social aptitude, implying that agents' practices vary across time, spaces, and distributions of power. Hence, a project might be a space that reshuffles the distribution of power in the host context. For example, a rural extension agent might have a say on budget allocation within a project that has adopted a participatory mechanism, but no voice in his everyday function. This leads us to question the ability of one field to influence another, or, in other words, the capacity of a project to change the positions of agents in other social fields, outside the project boundaries.

Research on power and participation has sought to understand how to create social spaces that are able to change other spaces. Gaventa (2006) acknowledges that power takes different dimensions in different spaces, according to who created them. He indicates that different spaces of power influence and permeate each other, arguing that the 'transformative potential of spaces... must always be assessed in relationship to the other spaces which surround them' (Gaventa, 2006, p.27). Along these lines, Cornwall has questioned the ability of participatory mechanisms to transcend the spaces they create. For her, whether participatory processes will be transformative depends on the 'leverage they offer other kind of actors, in other spaces; and on the opportunities they afford for people to gain voices that they can go on to use in other arenas' (Cornwall, 2002, p.20). The incorporation of these ideas into this research means that bricolage with project components outside project spaces is submitted to one's agency in other social fields, since 'bricoleurs have varying capacity and opportunities to shape institutions and are differently affected by their functioning' (Cleaver, 2012, p.45). It comes to the question of who has the power to shape practices in different fields and thus to borrow components from ad hoc experiences; and how agency can be construed by borrowing elements from other fields.

Bourdieu's concepts also help in understanding the ability of one social field to influence another by acknowledging that fields intertwine and have fluid boundaries, meaning that

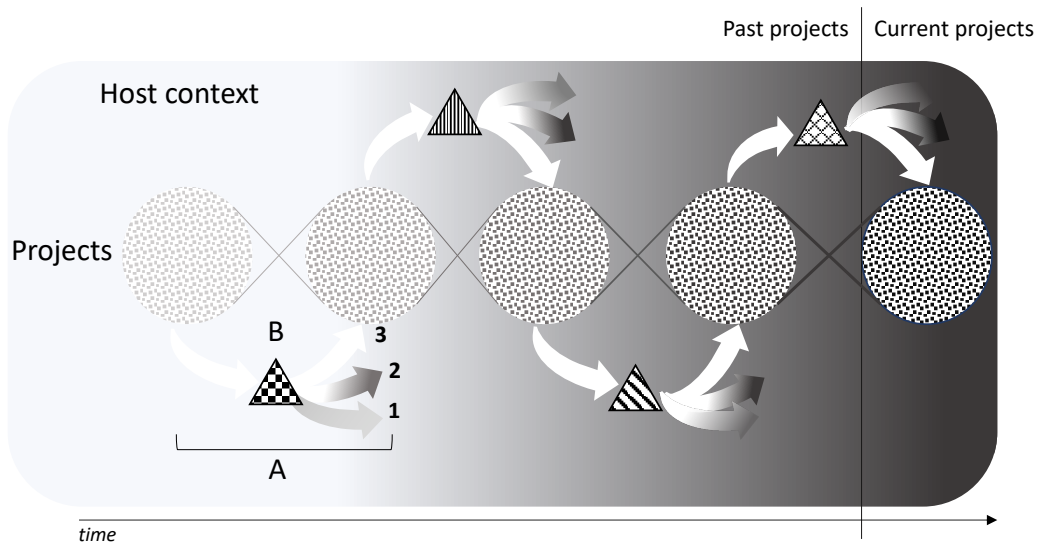
their boundaries ‘are constantly being shaped and reshaped both by internal struggles and by external interventions of agents of other fields; the dynamic of the field is the rule, stability is the exception’ (Bigo, 2011, p.240). From this perspective, the power relations and relations of domination that structure social fields ‘must always be situated in time, space, and subject area’ (Bigo, 2011, p.232). Adopting this approach, Zoccal (2018) studied how the international development field changed with the emergence of Southern providers from the 2000s. She argues that recipient countries were only able to expand the boundaries of the international development field when they acquired enough economic capital in the beginning of the 2000s. The economic development of emerging powers, such as Brazil, China, India, and South Africa, modified their position in the field, when, from being recipients, these countries became emerging donors and introduced divergent practices in traditional aid-hosting contexts. In doing so, they challenged traditions and the rules that had been taken for granted. This is an example of a change in power relations within the field because of internal struggles deriving from a new distribution of capital among agents. In this research, I take this further and analyse how the cotton sector was shaped and re-shaped by the international development field in different moments in time. Indeed, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, the position – and therefore the agency – of the actors engaged in the cotton sector changed over time. The power of the state, farmers, ginners, input importers, and foreign partners has varied. In this process of repositioning, the international development field, due to its importance within the cotton sector, played a role which I investigate in this thesis. I am also interested in how the power relations between dominant and subaltern – or between donor and recipient, project and context – evolved in spite of or in accordance with changes in the agents occupying those positions.

To conclude this section, I see the power structure functioning as a prism mediating the path from ad hoc to durable through institutional bricolage. As a prism does to light, power unpacks and refracts institutional arrangements, distinguishing those that are discarded, incorporated into other institutions in the host context, or re-used in subsequent projects. As argued above and as subsequent chapters show, power structures (and fields and practices alike) are not static. It is precisely such changes – and the role of projects within them – that this research investigates. The diagram below (figure 2) serves to summarise my conceptual framework.

The circles represent projects, inserted into an intermittent continuum that illustrates development cooperation spaces and ad hoc institutional arrangements. Projects appear as bounded spaces in the host context. The latter exists independently of projects and changes

with and without projects' influence, as the colour gradient of the background illustrates. The distinction between circles and the host context illustrates the project-context mismatch. The arrows represent the path from ad hoc to durable (A). The prism (B) is how the power structure shapes institutional bricolage, like a prism that refracts light. Note that the prism is different from one moment to another, illustrating the changes in the power structure of the host context. Passing through the prism, on the way from ad hoc to durable, some project institutional components disappear (1), while others become durable as bricoleurs incorporate them into other institutional settings within the host context (2) or borrow them in subsequent projects (3), building thereby ad hoc institutions.

Figure 2: Conceptual framework



In this section, I have presented the main concepts that frame my research. In the next section, I turn to the methods I adopted to approach these concepts.

2.2. Methods: My research trajectory

As I could not disentangle the methods from personal experiences, I begin with my encounter with Benin and my decision to study this country. I then dive into more detail about the process of data collection and analysis.

2.2.1. My encounter with Benin

Although I was in Haiti when the idea first came to me, I knew that I wanted to focus my research on a West African country. There, and particularly in Benin, I had had most of my professional experience as a development practitioner. I first went to Benin in 2010 when working at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in

Geneva. I was contributing to the implementation of a project on sustainable tourism. One of the activities was to organise a study tour for Beninese public staff to Senegal. This required constant contact with Beninese people. Their explicitly positive reaction whenever I said I was Brazilian drew my attention. ‘We are like brothers then’, I remember hearing a few times from project partners. I knew close to nothing about Benin and how its history intertwined with Brazil’s. I became more familiar with this connection a few years after my first encounter. I was then a project analyst for the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) and I was responsible for managing all technical cooperation projects we had with Benin. One of those was a project to record the material and immaterial Brazilian heritage in Beninese society. I learned then that the Bight of Benin had been an important slave port in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (well reported in Law, 2004). French, Dutch, English, and Portuguese outposts traded enslaved people that Dahomean kings captured in the hinterland. A fair share went to Brazil after crossing the ‘door of no return’ in Ouidah, a few kilometres east of Cotonou. From the second half of the nineteenth century, some freed people returned from Brazil and settled in their point of departure (Law, 2001; Ronen, 1975). The ‘returned’, or *aguda*, brought to the Dahomean coast many different aspects of Brazilian culture that are nowadays part of Beninese cultural heritage (Alem, 2005; Soumonni, 2001). The ‘Brazilian’, as the *aguda* came to be known, also formed a commercial elite, mainly because they had remarkable skills of negotiation that they used for exporting first ebony wood, then palm oil (Ronen, 1974). They thus became important landowners in the south. At the beginning of the French colonial administration, they were considered ‘almost white’ and were hired as public officials and intermediaries with other ethnic groups (Banégas, 2003; Ronen, 1975). Progressively, the *aguda* lost influence as more and more Dahomeans were instructed and permeated the colonial administration. The colony became the land of the *akowé*, the ‘evolved’, and the African *Quartier Latin* (as a reference to the neighbourhood in Paris in which the main universities and graduate schools are concentrated), exporting intellectuals instead of natural resources to other French territories. While the *akowé* led the movement for independence, the *aguda* were being pointed out as allies of the colonisers. The Brazilians were no longer an influential group, but their legacy can be easily found in Southern Benin, in the architecture of Porto-Novo and in the gastronomy, for example. I found this within development project spaces.

Having worked with Benin with a number of organisations, I could not help noticing the different social relations I established according to the organisation I was representing. The warmth and openness of project partners when in a Brazilian project contrasted with the

austerity of relations when introduced as a UN consultant (saying that I was Brazilian always worked as an icebreaker though). This made me pay attention to the importance of relationships within development encounters, and of meanings and perceptions in regards to the partner country. These seemed to be based on elements that extrapolated that precise moment in time. Thus, history and historical links between countries and organisations shaped social relations and project processes. I thought then that this would have an impact on project outcomes.

In this spirit, Benin emerged as a natural choice for the focus my research. In 2016, I went to Cotonou to deliver a workshop on international trade. I seized the opportunity to meet with Flavien,⁴ a former colleague from the Brazilian Embassy, who worked as liaison officer of the projects I used to manage. We spent a couple of hours talking about the progress of projects since I left ABC. We went through all of them, but the cotton project had the best stories. I was at ABC when we launched that project back in 2014 and organised the first activity in 2015. At the agency, it was known as the flagship project on agriculture with African countries. I became particularly attached to it because of my involvement in revising the project's logical framework with colleagues. This had been one of the best professional experiences I had had hitherto. Hence my curiosity to know how the project was being implemented.

At the hotel in Cotonou, Flavien shared with me the most recent events related to the project. One of them caught my attention. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was also implementing a cotton project in the same region and had contacted Brazil's project team to exchange experiences. I remember there were stories we told in Brasilia about French experts who walked into a project's experimentation field in Mali to check what we were doing there. Yet we never seemed eager to cooperate. No decision could be made in the field by project staff. This needed to be decided in Brasilia, via the official diplomatic channels. In the end, there would be no exchange between projects. Flavien seemed disappointed. Additionally, there were also German, Chinese, and Indian cotton projects being implemented, but there was no exchange among projects – at least none that he, as a liaison officer, was aware of. I wondered what his Beninese counterpart thought about that. The National Agricultural Research Institute of Benin (INRAB) was the host organisation for all these projects. It endures as projects continuously come and go, appear

⁴ All names have been changed.

and disappear, in the host context. As Flavien told me the stories, many questions popped up in my mind: what does the INRAB take from each of those projects, past and present? Is there a difference between China, Brazil, Germany, India, the US? How different are relationships in each project? What really matters to host actors in the end? Additionally, the president of the Republic, who had been elected a few months earlier, was known as the king of cotton. There was thus a conjunction of several elements I wanted to study. I went back home with some notes and the decision made to focus on development cooperation in the cotton sector in Benin.

2.2.2. Research design

In Brighton, I defined the objective of my research as identifying traces of past experiences promoted by development cooperation projects in current institutional arrangements. In other words, I aimed to capture the flow of institutional arrangements, relationships, processes, and practices from projects to other domains of action. These other settings could be other subsequent or contemporary projects, or prevailing institutions, those not created by a project and existing beyond and across them. From that perspective, and based on the conceptual framework proposed in the section above, past experiences lay-up to constitute one's practices. In the case of this research and of institutional bricolage, the sedimentation of past experiences is best illustrated by the idea of a repertoire of institutional components in which past experiences have a particular weight. In this sense, one draws from this repertoire to act and to react to everyday challenges.

To investigate the sources of the social constitution of the agent – or of one's repertoire of components – Wacquant proposes the following by building on Bourdieu's practice theory: the synchronic and inductive approach consists of tracing connections between patterns of preferences, strategies, and practices across realms of activity. In my case, this involved observing practices within and outside project boundaries, and interviewing project recipients about the borrowing of project components in their enduring practices. The second approach, diachronic and deductive, involves the reconstitution of sedimentation of layers of disposition (which shape an agent's practices) through the mapping of agents' life trajectories (Wacquant, 2014, p.6). In this regard, I conducted repeated in-depth interviews with key informants to collect oral histories and to locate project experiences in their life trajectories. Wacquant also proposed a third approach, experimental, which involves observation and lived experience in the institutions that provide institutional components. I

was less able to adopt this approach. In my view, it requires longer periods of immersion that would not fit within the time frame of a doctoral programme.

Setting boundaries

The definition of the boundaries of my research was the object of various conversations with my supervisors, colleagues, and researchers who attended my seminars at IDS. The question was whether I should limit my research to a site and or to a specific time frame. The final decision was informed by the data I collected in Benin. With regards to the delimitation of a site, I collected data in the main cotton-producing districts, in the northern departments (see figure 5). These places were also where recent cotton projects focussed their activities. However, I could not restrain myself from expanding to other provinces where cotton is less predominant, and hence fewer cotton projects intervene. The activities I observed and the people I interviewed in Donga, Collines, Zou, and other southern departments helped me understand the importance of cotton to accessing rural credit, and its relative weight in northern departments, where it predominates. Additionally, the cotton sector is organised vertically, from local organisations in the districts to national representations that sit in Cotonou. In the economic capital, I conducted archival research and met with staff from the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (MAEP), INRAB and other relevant organisations, such as the AIC, national representatives from cotton growers' organisations, NGOs, and staff from aid agencies. Considering the importance of the sector and the presence of cotton in the territory, a more specific site would have hindered more than it would have enhanced my research.

Moving now to setting time boundaries, I also let the fieldwork experience inform the path I followed. Initially, I had thought of focussing exclusively on two recent cotton projects that were still being implemented in 2017/18. Hence, I would mainly focus on the most recent generation of projects. As field research progressed, I realised that limiting my analysis to the time frames of projects would be against my research objective, which seeks to bring forward context perspectives. I also realised that research participants navigated across past and present projects, as though they were contemporary. They would mix project names, donors, and objectives, and would refer to a project while intending to refer to another that was implemented ten, twenty years ago. For example, during an interview, a cotton farmer may situate the sources of current practice in their childhood and early experiences with family members, or, conversely, to project activities that they had attended in 1995 and again in 2017. At first, I was stunned by the complexity that this lack of linearity imposed on my

research. Sometimes I wondered how I could be sure a participant was really mentioning one particular project and not another. Progressively, this became less of a problem and more an insight into project footprints in people's trajectories and on the composition of their repertoire of dispositions. This meant that individual life trajectories and memories, which are variably influenced by development projects, set the time boundaries of my research. As such, field research in Benin constituted an important part of this research.

Before I move to detail the data collection tools I adopted, it is necessary to lay out the definition of my sample. Within the context of the cotton sector in Benin, I targeted national boundary partners of development projects. These are stakeholders of the cotton sector who operate both within and outside the boundaries of intervention's spheres of influence (Earl et al., 2001). This means that these actors frequently navigate among projects and prevailing institutions, either as focal points, managers, experts, or beneficiaries. In the cotton sector in Benin, these groups of actors comprise agronomists and researchers from the Cotton Research Centre of the National Institute of Agricultural Research (CRA-CF); cotton farmers; rural extension agents; and MAEP civil servants, civil society organisations, and staff from the AIC. These groups constitute what I refer to as host actors. Not to imply that they are homogenous. For the scale of analysis that I have adopted in this research, which focus on the interactions between projects and the host context, I mainly refer to host actors as an ensemble. Their differences and varied agency are brought forward as I examine how individuals interact with projects so to understand the main patterns of project-host context relations. It should also be noted that the cotton sector is predominantly male, with stereotypes still determining the participation of women (Alidou and Niehof, 2013).

In addition, I went beyond the boundaries of projects and interviewed cotton ginners, who are key actors in the industry, but rarely involved in development projects. Although transporters play an important role in the functioning of the cotton sector, they engage in it intermittently and do not take part in its main organisation or structures. I then expanded my research to representatives from aid agencies and international organisations that were implementing cotton projects at the time of the fieldwork. Although they do not act across projects and prevailing structures, they provided me with important information on project management characteristics and on ongoing projects. Former and current staff from these organisations also helped me by providing information on past projects. I also included in my sample international development partners who have been implementing agricultural projects in cotton-producing areas without focussing on cotton. Because I adopted snowball sampling – meaning that I usually followed participants' suggestions of other interviewees, I

also ended up interviewing representatives from national farmers' unions and from local NGOs who intervened in agriculture, but not on cotton or in the main cotton-producing areas. The table below shows the breakdown of research participants by category. Further details on participants' profiles can be found in appendices A.1 and A.2.

Table 1: Number of research participants per groups of actors

Groups of actors	Number of interviewees
INRAB Agronomists	9
MAEP Extension Agents	9
Cotton growers	18
AIC	12
Civil Society Organisations	4
International Development Partners	17
Total	72
Number of participating institutions	15

Interviews and focus groups

I used interviews, and life stories specifically, as my main method of inquiry. In total, I conducted 83 interviews with 72 individuals from the categories described above. Each interview was recorded (with formal consent) and lasted for approximately one hour, except on a few occasions when one lasted for more than two hours. The interviews took place in very different settings, from under a tree in a field of cotton to offices in Cotonou. The choice of location was given to the interviewee after I presented the subject of my research, to enable them to make the most comfortable choice. Every research participant was forthcoming and flexible. As Herzog (2012) advises, I include my observations on the interview location and its meanings as an element of my research. For example, when conducting an interview in a farmer's backyard (as illustrated in figure 3, right), the undisturbed activities happening in the background often served to provide further explanation about the broader context underpinning their activity as cotton grower and even added elements to the interview. On one occasion, for instance, a household member arrived from the field with a basket of neem seeds which led to a conversation about the use of neem seeds as organic pesticide and the farmer's experience in a project activity. Similarly fruitful interruptions happened during interviews conducted in office spaces. In this sense, I kept the interview spaces permeable, allowing interference from participants' everyday activities.

The interviews were semi-structured and were all conducted in French, except for four that were conducted in Portuguese. This required me to translate all of the citations used in this

thesis from either French or Portuguese.⁵ For each cluster of informants, I had guiding questions organised in three sections: professional trajectory, current tasks, and involvement in cotton development projects. Towards the end, I focussed on their perceptions of the major changes they have seen in the cotton sector and on the role of their category in it. Following a first interview, I selected 23 informants with whom I conducted more than one and up to six interviews, in order to have an in-depth account of their life trajectory, and an oral history that focussed on their account of major historical events in the cotton sector, in order to understand how people observe the changes in their own practices and relationships in relation to a broad historical process (as suggested by Atkinson, 1998; Giles-Vernick, 2006). I would use the intervals between interviews to review the topics covered in the previous meeting and identify the elements I wanted to take further on the next occasion.

In addition to conducting multiple interviews with the same informants, I also organised focus groups and collective interviews. Following Beitin (2012) and Morgan (2012), here I make a distinction between focus groups that were content-oriented with participants from the same cluster, and collective interviews, where I focussed less on the topic and more on the interactions among informants from different socio-professional categories (e.g. agronomists, farmers, extension agents). The focus groups I organised were structured with clear objectives. With agronomists, I designed a script with collective exercises to identify and discuss their perspectives on development projects and on the contrasts with their own work environment (see figure 3 below, left). With farmers and extension agents, I focussed on their current practices while also gathering stories on old ways of growing cotton or giving agricultural advice. Collective interviews helped me see how agents from different clusters interacted among themselves. These settings gave me a glimpse of the power relations between actors that I explored further during individual interviews and participant observations.

⁵ Original excerpts can be found in Appendix A.4 for reference and the transcription files are available on request.

Figure 3: Focus group in Parakou (left) and interview setting in Boko (right)



Participant observation

As a participant observer, I leant more on the complete observer position than on the complete participant, meaning that my main focus was observation, even though it necessarily meant a level of participation (O'Reilly, 2009). I observed and participated in farmers' cooperative meetings, project field visits, cotton research monitoring field tours, farming activities, and AIC workshops and activities in the districts, such as the distribution of agricultural inputs (such as fertilisers, herbicides, and pesticides). For each activity, I was authorised by the organisers, I presented myself as PhD researcher, and I informed other participants on the objectives of my research. The observant participation in activities carried out within and outside projects boundaries showed me the distinction between these social spaces and their influence on relationships, processes, and practices. For example, I observed cotton researchers interacting with farmers and extension agents for three days in the bush, and with project partners in Parakou and Cotonou. I also accompanied farmers in their everyday practices in the field, in their meetings with extension agents and cotton researchers, and in the cooperatives, and could note the interaction with input suppliers during an AIC workshop on the correct application of chemical fertilisers. On these occasions, I was paying particular attention to the way they interacted, to those whose voice prevailed, to interruptions, and to the identification of possible social hierarchies between actors.

Questionnaire

Halfway through the field research, I started to see a pattern in the data I had been collecting through interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions. My interviews had become more structured, with some key elements I wanted to explore further to validate some of my initial findings – namely the small footprint of projects among farmers. In this context, I designed a simple questionnaire to enable me to reach more research participants

and complement the qualitative content, which constitutes the core of my research. The questionnaire revolved around the involvement of cotton sector actors in development projects. I deployed the questionnaire at the beginning of the cropping season, when farmers come to the cooperative headquarters in the district capitals to collect their agricultural inputs. This allowed me to reach to 240 respondents, of which 208 were cotton growers. A synthesis of results, the profiles of respondents, and the questionnaire's flow chart can be found in Appendix A.3. The results served as an accessory tool that I use on a few occasions in chapters 4 and 5.

Secondary sources

I used documentary analysis in conjunction with the above methods. I adopted a critical approach (as described in Wooffitt, 2005), in the sense that I examined the way the documents relate to the broader social structures of the host context, and their role in the production and reproduction of power relations.

The documents I studied were mainly secondary data from public sources. They included:

- Programme documents: project documents, reports, evaluations, strategic papers, communication documents, policy briefs, assessment reports, brochures, pamphlets, and other relevant documents produced by the programmes.
- Government of Benin sources: strategic plans, legal documents, economic reports, census reports, development programmes, archives.
- INRAB documents: policy briefs, reports, manuals, archive of past cooperation partnerships.
- Documents from national organisations (cooperatives, associations): constitutions, forms, minutes, reports, pamphlets, brochures.

Many of these documents are available online through the organisations' official websites. For example, the majority of project documents and reports in the online repositories of the World Bank and CIRAD are open access. During field research in Benin, I visited the physical archives of the MAEP, the INRAB, and the documentation centres in the districts. My main objective was to find documents related to past projects. However, despite the help of the staff, only recent project training materials were available. People who were involved in projects advised me to ask current and former staff for project documents instead of going through public archives. Cotton researchers, MAEP staff, and CIRAD staff positively responded to my requests for documents in Cotonou and via email. Farmers and AIC staff

also shared documents that helped me understand the functioning of the cotton sector and the broader context in which projects intervene. In the same vein, I also had access to Lasdel's library in Parakou, where I was hosted during fieldwork. The figures below present examples of documents I collected during field research.

Figure 4: Documentation found in the documentation centre in Banikoara (left) and a cooperative of cotton growers' accounting ledger (right)



2.2.3. Access to field research: Reflections on fieldwork and positionality

I spent eleven months in Benin, from October 2017 to August 2018. I was based in Parakou, a city situated in the north, where cotton is predominant. The Beninese branch of the Laboratoire d'Études et de Recherches sur les Dynamiques Locales et le Développement Local (Lasdel) hosted me as a visiting researcher. They provided an office space, which allowed me to have daily contact with local researchers and students from the University of Parakou, who also used the centre's facilities, and the opportunity to engage in rich dialogues and seminars. The northern region (composed of the departments of Alibori, Atacora, Donga, and Borgou – see map in figure 5 below) is where the CRA-CF has its headquarters and many experimentation fields, since the Northern region is where cotton production is concentrated (see figure 5). The AIC also has a regional office in Parakou, where the actions directed to northern departments are coordinated. From Parakou I was able to reach cotton farmers in the main cotton-producing districts, such as Banikoara, Kandi, Péhunco, and Bembereke. In addition, the geographic position of Parakou enabled me to visit districts where cotton is not as popular, but still important, such as Bassila and Boko. These villages are, to a certain extent, neglected by development partners working on cotton.

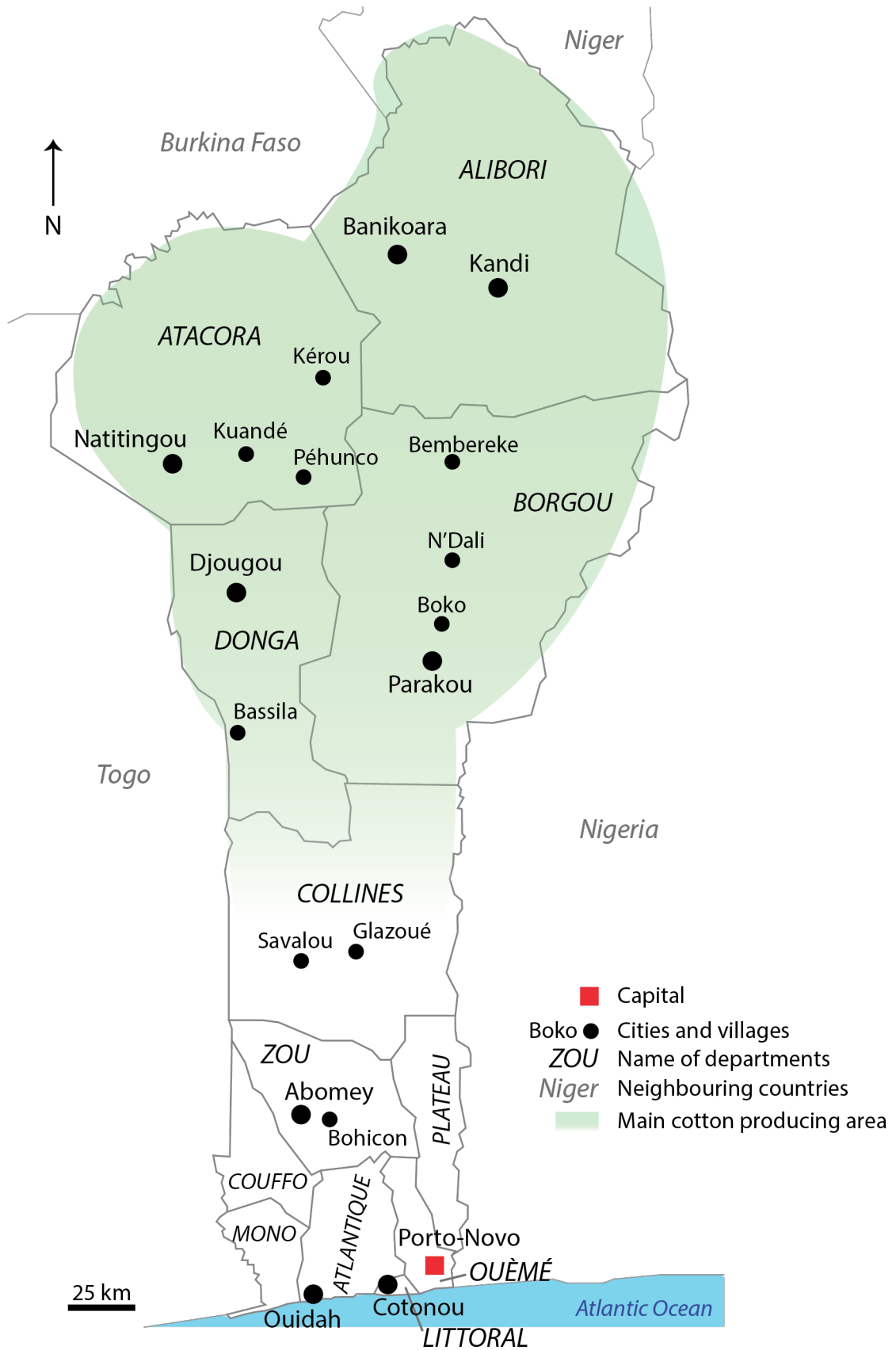
Because I had worked on a cotton project before, as I mentioned above, my first contacts were with former colleagues and project focal points in Benin. As a recruiting strategy, the snowball method is particularly useful in cross-cultural research settings (see Liamputtong, 2010 for example), and it helped me to get known by other groups as I extended my sample.

I started field research by meeting former project contacts as soon as I landed in Cotonou. They suggested names in Cotonou and in the northern districts, where I would spend most of my time. I am extremely grateful for INRAB and CRA-CF staff in Cotonou and in the districts for connecting me to other groups of actors, such as the AIC, extension agents, farmers, and development partners, all around the country. Thanks to them, I already had meetings scheduled when I arrived to settle in Parakou.

However, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I was particularly concerned about bias resulting from my positionality and my method of accessing research participants. The contacts that my former colleagues suggested were strongly linked to the project I used to work on. I found it difficult to disentangle myself from that project. At times, participants thought that I was still involved in the project. They would ask me to liaise with Brasilia or introduce me to new people as working for the cotton project. As a result, sometimes I felt resistance from participants in regards to speaking openly about their experiences within projects. Progressively, as my stay in Parakou lasted and after multiple meetings and interviews, I started to feel that they saw me more as a curious researcher than as a project manager.

Conversely, at Lasdel, I was only a researcher studying cotton projects in general. This helped me overcome some limitations of snowball sampling (Liamputtong, 2010). Cotton has been studied by local researchers, and in the centre's library I found sources I could not find elsewhere. The centre's director at the time, Cather O. Z. Nansounon, had studied 'cotton from below', as the title of his book suggests (Nansounon, 2012). We held various informal 'corridor' meetings in which we discussed the progress of my fieldwork and he suggested contacts in Banikoara, his hometown and the main cotton producing district. Thus, I could combine contacts coming from project partners and from Lasdel researchers. In this sense, my stay at Lasdel and relationships with the staff there were very important for me and my research. Additionally, I kept a journal in which I reflected on how my positionality affected my encounters and analyses.

Figure 5: Map of Benin



Source: Author's own illustration based on data from the National Geographical Institute of Benin and INRAB

Although my contacts with Lasdel brought some diversification to my sample, I remained open to exploring what my presence in the field provided. The extract from my field journal below explains how I got to my first interview with a farmer in a village located a few miles from Parakou.

I was a little frustrated and lost. I felt the need to diversify my contacts. One day I crossed the road in front of Lasdel to go for a walk in the Albarika neighbourhood. I needed to find a place to make photocopies of the information sheet and consent form. When I got on the first street, on the other side of the road, I bumped into Magloire, who was washing his motorbike in a small stall. I had met him a few days before at Lasdel, because one of his relatives works there. He is the kind of guy who sticks on you, calls you regularly, wants to be with you only to know a bit more about distant places and cultures. He is a development broker as well. He has worked with several projects in the past, mainly on health, and now he works in a local lab conducting water analyses. The lab had been built by a German cooperation programme that ended a year ago. He has also helped foreign researchers (mostly Germans) who stayed at Lasdel. I said I was going to make photocopies. 'I'll go with you!' he said. After making a hundred copies I invited him for lunch. He didn't seem busy and had to wait for his motorbike to be washed anyways. Over lunch he asked me many questions about my research and said he could help me getting to the villages to see cotton fields and meet cotton producers. Sure, why not. The next day we would go to a rural village 20km north of Parakou.

The village is a *village-rue* on the road that goes from Parakou to the north of Benin and Niger. Arriving there we met his friends at the market that lies along the main road, the heart of the village. After the cordial greetings he asked an elderly man where the closest cotton fields were. This was our first idea: to see the fields and, eventually, bump into a farmer. They directed us to a group of people sitting a few meters from there, specifically to the *Doyen* of Boko, a short and chubby 60-year-old man. He says he does know where to find cotton fields and he would take us there, but he has run out of fuel. 'With a bottle of fuel, we can make it... it's not far'. He goes to find his bike, I pay for fuel, and we take the road again. After a few hundred meters on the main road we turned left, straight on a small muddy pathway in the middle of fields of maize, yams, beans, and soy.

We passed through two isolated Fulani⁶ villages, in the middle of the bush, kids playing, women cooking, and men taking care of livestock. Magloire started to become impatient with the road. In some parts he had to roll with his feet on the ground because of the sand. 'He said it wasn't far! Eh! How far it is?' He yelled through the fields. 'One should always be suspicious when a peasant says it is not far...'. 'Not far, not far' the *Doyen* yelled back. 'The road turns right, then left, and we get there'. And we wouldn't. And Magloire kept complaining. Eventually we'd get there anyways...

⁶ Fulani is a nomad ethnic group spread across the countries of the Sahel.

And we did. Compared with CRA-CF experimentation fields, this one was cheerless. I asked if I could take some pictures. No objection. Then we finally started talking.

‘I don’t grow cotton anymore... this field belongs to a relative.’

‘But have you?’

‘Yes! A lot... long-time ago...’

I had my recorder, my consent forms, and information sheets and I thought that a spontaneous interview wasn’t such a bad idea. He accepted. We went back to the tree where we had parked the bikes and we made ourselves as comfortable as we could.

After the interview, the Doyen connected me to other cotton farmers in the village who were also active members of the cotton growers’ village cooperative. I ended up returning there many times to meet the Doyen and members of the cooperative. Thanks to this, I was informed of cooperative meetings and introduced to more farmers. They also suggested contacts above them in the farmers’ organisational structure. I could then move from the village cooperative to the district and department organisations. I combined those suggestions with the ones I received from the AIC branch in Parakou. They shared contacts of the heads of cotton farmers’ village and district cooperatives in Banikoara, Bembereke, Kandi, and Péhunco. I would usually go on trips for a few days in those villages, where I would meet the heads of cooperatives, AIC staff, and Centre Action Régionale pour le Développement Rural (CARDER) extension agents. As a result, if at first my contacts in the south connected me to people in the north, eventually research participants in the north suggested names and organisations in the south.

Regarding my positionality, from all these interactions, I found myself in a place that I had never been before. To a certain extent, I expected to be more an outsider within (Beoku-Betts, 1994), but the identity that I was assigned had put me, at first, in the outsider category only. Some of my interlocutors saw me as the privileged ‘White Man’ coming from the Global North to study Africa. I am Brazilian, from a lower middle-class family in a marginalised region of Brazil, and having a mixed racial background, I have become used to being either white or black according to the space in which I find myself. In Benin, I was only white. In Parakou and in the smaller rural districts of northern Benin, I was maybe the whitest person some children had seen that week, or month, or year.

Being an outsider conducting cross-cultural research might be an obstacle to gaining access to research participants or to establishing trustworthy relationships (Liamputtong, 2010). Interestingly, I did not experience that. Being considered white and French somehow opened

more doors, as people were eager to talk and share their ideas. I encountered more difficulties in interviewing foreign actors than Beninese people. This made me think of the internalisation of powerlessness and Frantz Fanon's study of the inferiority complex, in which he observes psycho-pathologies in colonised people resulting from decades of violence and cultural, social, and economic domination (Fanon, 1952, 2002). This perspective also gave me insights into the effects of structural power relations in the cotton sector, because the voluntaristic engagement in this research faded as the participant profile moved nearer the cotton elite. For instance, ginneries and foreign staff were those with whom access was more difficult. By contrast, farmers saw me as an opportunity to have their voice heard in Cotonou and abroad, or expected me to teach them better agricultural practices. For some time, I did not know how to react in order to avoid knowledge extractivism and sustaining the dichotomy between informants and knowledge producers (Burman, 2018). Although I could not answer their requests completely, I could not ignore them either and I was eager to make any contribution I could. I had the privilege of being part of different social networks and decided to connect farmers to other actors of the cotton sector, when requested and authorised by both sides. My internal commitment with my research collaborators also gave me strength to take this project towards completion – not that I envision this research having a particular direct impact on them, but perhaps a contribution to my project manager fellows and the next projects they and myself are going to implement.

2.2.4. Piecing together life stories, project documents, and literature

At the end of my stay at Lasdel, I had the privilege of presenting a summary of the activities I had carried out in front of an audience composed of CRA-CF agronomists, Lasdel researchers, and extension agents. I also presented a preliminary structure of the data analysis, which evolved to become the present thesis structure. The debate that followed my presentation between members of the audience provided me with additional insights about the multiple perspectives emerging from the context. Back in Brighton, I started piecing together the data.

I started by transcribing interviews and coding them according to the preliminary structure while I was still in Benin. I used the NVivo software for transcribing and coding interviews and field notes. As I transcribed, I would update the inventory of projects and make consistency checks with other sources, such as project documents that I could find online or that were provided by interviewees. It was an interesting process to match the list of projects in life trajectories, with subjective and blurred periods, to the list of projects on the inventory

I was making. I could see discrepancies and confusions that told me about the place of projects in a participant's life trajectory. This contrasted with the cold Excel table that I was compiling with data, project objectives, partners, and budget.

In addition to the mismatch between the different types of sources (oral and written), I also had to deal with different perspectives from different actors. Sometimes, cotton researchers, farmers, and extension agents would mention distinct time frames or objectives with regards to the same project. In such cases, written sources helped me make connections and understand how the same initiative imparted distinct experiences to different groups of actors. In this sense, although the period of implementation I present in brackets after the acronym of each project is from the written sources, I by no means intend to discard informants' lived temporality of projects.

Against this background, I continued to expand my review of the literature and the conceptual framework. I found that the concept of institutional bricolage provided the best framework for my research. Guided by Cleaver and Whaley (2018), the analytical framework around processes, power, and meanings helped me make sense of the complexity of the institutional arrangements I observed. In particular, the emphasis on meaning, built from past experiences, allowed me to approach the multiple perspectives I had gathered from Benin. I was also invited to further engage with the literature on power and its different forms, and on the role of history in everyday actions.

Before I dive into how projects' ad hoc components become durable, let me provide background information about the constitution of the cotton sector in Benin. Such is the topic of the next chapter, before I turn to the investigation of project footprints in the host context in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3. THE HOST CONTEXT: THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COTTON SECTOR SINCE 1960

In the first chapter, I demonstrated the contradictions in development cooperation projects that sustain the project-context mismatch. I showed that there have been several attempts from development cooperation theorists, practitioners, and policy actors to transform the development cooperation landscape. The expansion of SSC initiatives also contributed to the debate because it was underpinned by a context-similarity claim between provider and host countries, thus apparently eliminating the mismatch. However, all that seemed insufficient to enable a development project to trigger structural change in a host context. While an ascertainment of the inabilities of development cooperation projects could lead to a complete neglect of project relevance, I propose that project processes can be better understood when perceived from the perspective of host contexts.

When I arrived in Benin to implement a cotton project, I knew little about the crop and its meaning in Beninese society. I did not know the projects that had preceded mine, nor the impact they had had. Therefore, to understand how a context comes to incorporate project arrangements, it is necessary to begin by introducing the historical trajectory of the host context and its constitution as a field of struggle in which development cooperation takes place. A field is constituted through time and is centred around an object of struggle – in this case the earnings from cotton. The dynamics of the field are governed by the power relations between agents engaged within the field, which in turn regularise practices and create rules that become taken for granted. This chapter presents the cotton sector as a field in such terms and identifies the waves of cotton projects in that process. To do so, this chapter is structured in four chronological stages of the constitution of the field, from colonial rule to the emergence of a national private elite.

3.1. Cotton under colonial rule beyond independence

We do not know precisely when cotton started being cultivated in West Africa and in the territory that today corresponds to Benin (Kriger, 2005). Levrat (2008) and Beckert (2015) suggest that cotton has been produced on a small scale and traded in West Africa at least since the eleventh century. If the cotton boll was already spun and woven to make cloth, its production remained extensive, used small inputs, and mainly served the local market. This configuration remained stable for a long time, as Manning (1980) suggests in his report into the technology of production in Dahomey circa 1900.

The French colonial administration was the trigger that made farmers prioritise cotton instead of other crops, including food crops for subsistence. However, it took some time for that project to be consolidated and for France to become the main actor in the cotton sector in Benin. Cotton had become a strategic sector for France, which was seeking to become less dependent on US cotton, then responsible for 31 per cent of world production (FAOSTAT, 2020). But cotton production in French West Africa remained low because of the lack of concrete policy and investment from the colonial administration (Levrat, 2008, pp.51–56). In Dahomey, cotton production gradually increased, reaching its peak at 3,000 tonnes in 1950, but palm oil and palm kernels remained the biggest export goods (Manning, 2004, p.233).

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the French colonial administration strengthened the project of intensifying cotton production in the African colonies due to the shortage of cotton supply in the international market and the increasing dependency on US lint (Levrat, 2009). In 1946, France created the Research Institute of Cotton and Exotic Textiles (IRCT) and, in 1949, the French Company for Fibre and Textile Development (CFDT) to develop the cotton industry in the French colonies. The IRCT and CFDT were designed to work together: one in the development of varieties through experimentation, and the other functioning as a technical cooperation organisation to promote the recommended ‘technical itinerary’,⁷ consisting of a formalised sequence of practices, based on previous agronomical research, that informs the most productive farming techniques for a given crop and context – in this case, the technical itinerary was drawn up based on IRCT findings (Clouvel et al., 2007). Both organisations became important drivers of the development of the cotton sector after the country obtained independence in 1960.

Dahomey became independent in August 1960, following a gradual and peaceful process that started with local elections in the 1950s (Magnusson, 1997; Morgenthau and Behrman, 1984). After independence, the political configuration remained articulated around three ethno-regional parties (Decalo, 1973; Staniland, 1973), consolidated during the previous decade, but which could not bring political stability: between 1960 and 1969, Dahomey had eleven presidents, six different constitutions, and twelve coups d’état (Bierschenk, 2009, p.348).

⁷ *Itinéraire technique* in French.

Meanwhile, the economy – and the cotton sector – seemed pushed to the background. The political forces continued to bargain, but this produced very little discussion on the major economic or constitutional issues (Staniland, 1973, p.501). Despite the political prominence of the national elite, the *akowé*, or ‘evolved’, successive civilian and military governments were not able to disentangle the ties with the country’s former coloniser. Instead, the signature of multiple cooperation agreements kept independent Dahomey dependent on resources from the former colonial power (Anignikin, 2010, p.35; d’Almeida-Topor, 2002).

This dependence was reflected in the first national development programmes. Sotindjo (2008) demonstrates that there was a continuity of development plans before and after independence, with French financial support. In the postcolonial context, French experts continued to be regarded as enablers of change in the agricultural sector because of their longstanding experience on the ground (Keese, 2019, p.269). Notwithstanding independence, the same labour relations that had prevailed under French rule remained after independence, with land expropriation and coercive labour now tagged as ‘cooperativisation’ through the support of World Bank projects (Le Meur, 1995; Keese, 2019). In the cotton sector, the IRCT and CFDT continued to fund research and technical assistance, alongside the French Société d’Aide Technique et Coopération (Company of Technical Assistance and Cooperation) (Gergely, 2009; Kpadé and Boinon, 2011; Sotindjo, 2008).

It is in this context that cotton projects appeared in the cotton sector in Benin, as a continuation of colonial rule. Dahomey signed with France, in 1963, its first cotton-related bilateral project, financed by the French Aid and Cooperation Fund and implemented by the CFDT. The five-year project focussed on the Borgou province, which corresponds today to the Alibori and Borgou provinces (see map on figure 5), and aimed to multiply national production fourfold. The Support to Cotton Production Project (1963–1969) can be considered to have made cotton the main cash crop in Benin. After several trials from the nineteenth century onwards of making Dahomey a reliable provider of raw cotton (Labouret, 1928), the French succeeded in intensifying production and organising the industry through this project: production increased considerably from 2,000 tonnes in 1960 to 24,000 in 1969, and so did yields from 270kg/ha in 1961–1965, to 600kg/ha in 1965–1967, and 825kg/ha in 1968–1970 (Kpadé and Boinon, 2011; Levrat, 2009; World Bank, 1972). Such increases became possible because of the introduction of new high-yield varieties and the provision of fertilisers. These elements combined increased outputs per hectare. Additionally, the project converted almost every farmer into a cotton producer by limiting access to farm credit exclusively to cotton growers (Mongbo and Dossou-Houessou, 2000). The project built the

institutional foundations that would shape the cotton industry over the next decades, organised around an integrated system in which one company – the CFDT – was responsible for the provision of inputs, rural extension services, marketing, and ginning (Clouvel et al., 2007; Fontaine and Sindzingre, 1991).

The implementation of the integrated system led to the creation of the National Agricultural Cotton Company (SONACO) in 1971 to replace the CFDT. The objectives of the company were ‘to prepare and execute cotton development programmes, which would include other crops cultivated by cotton growers, and to provide cotton growers with extension services and primary marketing facilities’ (World Bank, 1972, p.35). However, the overall management of the sector remained under the CFDT’s control. A joint venture between the CFDT and the government of Dahomey established that the government would fix the prices and provide the ginning facilities, whereas the French company would be responsible for buying and collecting seed cotton, processing, and exporting. Profits – or losses – from operations would be split 80%-20%, respectively.

Against this background, enjoying favourable market conditions for cotton and the crop becoming more and more popular amongst farmers, the government requested a loan from the World Bank to consolidate the cotton sector. The Zou-Borgou Cotton Project (WB-ZBC) took off in 1972. It was only the second World Bank project in the agricultural sector in Dahomey (the first one focussed on the development of palm products and food crops in the south). The objectives remained the same: to increase cotton production in both provinces of the north through the expansion of cotton fields and of the number of growers. Other crops, when in rotation, would benefit from the residual effects of fertilisers applied to cotton. The project would also provide institutional support for SONACO, build two new ginneries, rehabilitate roads, and prepare an agricultural diversification project (World Bank, 1972).

The project strategy was very clear. While the World Bank provided funds and experts, the collaboration with French institutions would ensure the operationalisation of the activities and reinforce the institutions the French had set up in Dahomey. In this context, the cotton sector was controlled by a consortium involving France and the World Bank, because Beninese actors were more concerned with political stability and lacked the necessary capital to change their position in that field.

This configuration changed from 1972. Until then, the ethno-regional political forces had continued to take turns in power, none of them being able to bring political stability. While

alternating in power, the three forces, headed by old generations of *akowé*, became unable to contain the claims of the young elite, headed by students organised in unions in the main cities. Senior military personnel, who had also been involved in coups and in government since 1963, joined patronage networks and the bargain for public resources (Allen, 1992a). Additionally, the country could not overcome the public debt crisis. The economic crisis, stemming from an increase in public expenditure on jobs and subsidies to the palm sector, caused political instability, which paralysed public institutions and impeded public action (Igue and Soule, 1992, pp.41–42). This situation fostered dissent among young *akowé* and members of the military, who could not see opportunities for promotion within the existing political structures, increasing inter-generational rivalries. The alliance of young ‘evolved’ with young military officials from the north of the country led to the putsch of 1972 that brought to power Major Mathieu Kérékou. In an interview with French television in that same year, Kérékou explained the coup by arguing that ‘Dahomey is too small to have three presidents’ (Institut National de l’Audiovisuel, 1972). The arrival in power of Mathieu Kérékou affected the power relations in the cotton sector, as cotton had become an object of struggle for the emerging postcolonial state. Table 2 summarises the projects of that period from independence until Kérékou’s coup d’État.

Table 2: Cotton projects in Benin from 1960 to 1980

PERIOD OF IMPLEMENTATION	PROJECT TITLE	DONOR/ PROVIDER	OBJECTIVE
1963–1969	Support to Cotton Production Project <i>Projet d’Appui à la production du coton</i>	France	To quadruple national production of seed cotton
1972–1977	Zou-Borgou Cotton Project (ZBCP) <i>Projet Zou-Borgou de Culture du Coton au Dahomey</i>	World Bank (+France)	To increase seed cotton production in the Zou and Borgou regions, through increasing the areas under cotton and number of growers
1977–1982	Technical Assistance Project (WB-TAP) <i>Projet d’Assistance Technique</i>	World Bank (+France)	To provide technical assistance services to SONAGRI

3.2. The emergence of the state as the cotton power

Kérékou’s regime took some years to consolidate, time needed to establish and reinforce the alliances with students and the military and to co-opt the peasants from the north (Allen, 1992a; Genné, 1978). In its first years, Kérékou’s regime seemed like ‘the natural continuation of the process of erosion of civil and political authority in the Dahomey’ (Decalo, 1973, p.447), but to respond to the claims from urban leftist movements, Kérékou adopted

Marxism-Leninism as the state ideology and put forward a rupture with French rule as the new national independence policy (Allen, 1992a, 1992b). In 1975, the Republic of Dahomey became the People's Republic of Benin.

This change in the command of the state had a direct impact on the structure of the cotton sector. The consolidation of Kérékou's regime meant a rupture with the CFDT in 1975. The government dismembered SONACO (then managed by the CFDT) into two different public companies, each of them responsible for a segment of activities: SONAGRI for the organisation and supervision of production, and SONACEB for commercialisation, marketing, and export (Kpadé, 2011). Rural extension services were strengthened with the expansion towards northern departments of the Centres d'Action Régionale pour le Développement Rural (CARDER), created in 1972 (Ayo, 1984). The Groupement Villageois (GV), local cooperatives of producers, also gained importance in the same period. The GV became responsible for the organisation of production at the local level, from the distribution of fertilisers to the collection of harvested cotton (Fok, 2010). The earnings from cotton production were spent locally on literacy programmes, schools, and infrastructure (Kpadé, 2011).

This new political and economic context reshuffled the positions of power in the cotton sector. In this new configuration, foreign actors and cotton projects lost relevance. In 1973, a year after its launch, the WB-ZBC project was flagged as a 'problem project' by Washington when a supervision mission found that public companies were taking control over extension services, cotton marketing and ginning, and lint and seed sales:

During the first year of implementation, Government decided to entrust immediately the responsibility for field operations of cotton extension services, ginning and primary marketing to SONACO, and lint marketing to the Société Nationale de Crédit Agricole et de Commercialisation (SOCAD), the agricultural export agency. This action was in violation of the agreement that the two French technical assistance agencies (CFDT and SATEC) would maintain control of field operations, under the SONACO umbrella, and that CFDT would retain control over cotton marketing, for much of the project period, though in all cases gradually shifting responsibility to Beninoise and Government institutions. The action resulted in a de facto suspension of disbursements for nine months... Most of SATEC and CFDT expatriate staffs left the project in 1974 [sic]. (World Bank, 1978, p.2)

As a result, the World Bank temporarily suspended disbursements, but decided to keep the project running in order to remain present in Benin. In 1977, the World Bank released the remaining funds to pay for the debts that SONAGRI had contracted in the meantime. The donors opted to postpone the implementation of large rural development projects to focus

first on institutional support through a Technical Assistance Project (WB-TAP, 1977–1982) (World Bank, 1977). At this point, the World Bank took over as the main development partner. France's influence faded as CFDT was no longer responsible for overseeing cotton production, but France remained present in the meantime by co-funding the WB-TAP project, agricultural research, and infrastructure works. The project evaluation report considered WB-TAP another failure, as it only resulted in the drafting of the subsequent projects. World Bank evaluators claimed that the project was overoptimistic in a contested political context, failing to strengthen SONAGRI's financial management and to reinforce the CARDER's extension services (World Bank, 1978).

As the government took control of the sector, its interventions gave cotton another meaning, diverging from the intensification path promoted by both France and the World Bank. During Kérékou's first years, the cotton sector was no longer a priority for either the government or farmers. Kérékou's agricultural policy focussed primarily on food crops, and a reduction in the purchase price of seed cotton discouraged farmers from remaining engaged in the sector (see in figure 6 the decline of area cultivated with cotton from 1975). Farmers prioritised subsistence crops over cotton, opting mainly for maize, a crop well-known by farmers and which requires less intensive labour (Kpadé and Boinon, 2011). Overall, during the early years of Kérékou's regime, the agricultural sector lacked investment to accompany the government programmes in the villages (Ayo, 1984; Allen, 1992a). In fact, the whole economic programme failed. The regime created a plethora of parastatals and government positions that increased public debt to unprecedented levels (Allen, 1992b). As such, in 1979, Benin was in a deep economic crisis, similar to pre-1972 levels. Protests were held in Cotonou, while farmers continued to move away from cotton production to food crops. At the beginning of the 1980s, as a reaction to the situation, the government entered a phase of policy revision in which cotton would again become a key economic asset.

The second decade of Kérékou's regime was characterised by political openness, pragmatism, structural adjustments, and permanent crisis that ultimately led to its fall (Banégas, 2003). Despite the Marxist-Leninist state ideology, the social and economic policies never reflected this paradigm, it being more a rhetoric and public language to gain the support of students at the beginning of the revolution than a political and economic programme (Ayo, 1984; Allen, 1992a; Banégas, 2003; Genné, 1978). The economic crisis of the end of the 1970s, triggered mainly by public debt, precipitated the end of the regime. In the cotton sector, this entailed a reconfiguration of the positions in the field and the return of development projects (see summary of projects in that period in table 3).

Two World Bank provincial rural development projects, one in Borgou and another in the Zou department, were signed with the aim of putting the cotton sector back on the path of intensification and of the ongoing attempt to simulate the Asian Green Revolution in Africa (Fontaine and Sindzingre, 1991; Frankema, 2014; Harrison, 1987). These projects occupied a position in the cotton sector that was left vacant during the 1970s. With the power to reshape the rules, these projects developed certain aspects of the cotton industry that became institutional anchors for further developments. For instance, the projects introduced the necessary resources for building new infrastructure, such as ginning plants in the new cotton-producing zones in the north, which presented more favourable climate conditions for cotton growing. The projects also strengthened the CARDERs and rural extension services by providing training and material support to the regional branches. With regards to cotton production, the World Bank projects stimulated the general use of chemical fertilisers, which were hitherto very low in African countries and corresponded to the Bank's strategy for agricultural development in Sub-Saharan African states (Fontaine and Sindzingre, 1991; Morris et al., 2007). While the provision of agrochemicals provided a remarkable boost to cotton production, it also increased the cost of production and thereby farmers' dependence on rural credit. The project also supported the liquidity of the rural credit scheme. As a result, the World Bank projects of the 1990s consolidated the input credit system, tying cotton production to rural credit on one hand, and rural credit to cotton production on the other.

Table 3: Cotton projects in Benin in the 1980s

PERIOD OF IMPLEMENTATION	PROJECT TITLE	DONOR/ PROVIDER	OBJECTIVE
1981–1988	Borgou Province Rural Development Project (BPRDP) <i>Projet de Développement Rural dans la Province du Borgou</i>	World Bank	To improve rural incomes and promote exports by improving and diversifying production of the principal crops in the Borgou province, primarily cotton and maize
1982–1992	Zou Province Rural Development Project (ZPRDP) <i>Projet de Développement Rural dans la Province du Zou</i>	World Bank (+France)	To improve rural incomes by increasing the production of cotton and food crops
1988–1993	Borgou Province Rural Development Project II (BPRDP II) <i>Second Projet de Développement Rural du Borgou</i>	World Bank (+France, ADB)	To consolidate and improve gains from Borgou I and to begin a programme of sectoral adjustment

In contrast with the first attempt at intensification, national companies – instead of the CFDT – became responsible for the organisation and management of the sector. In 1983,

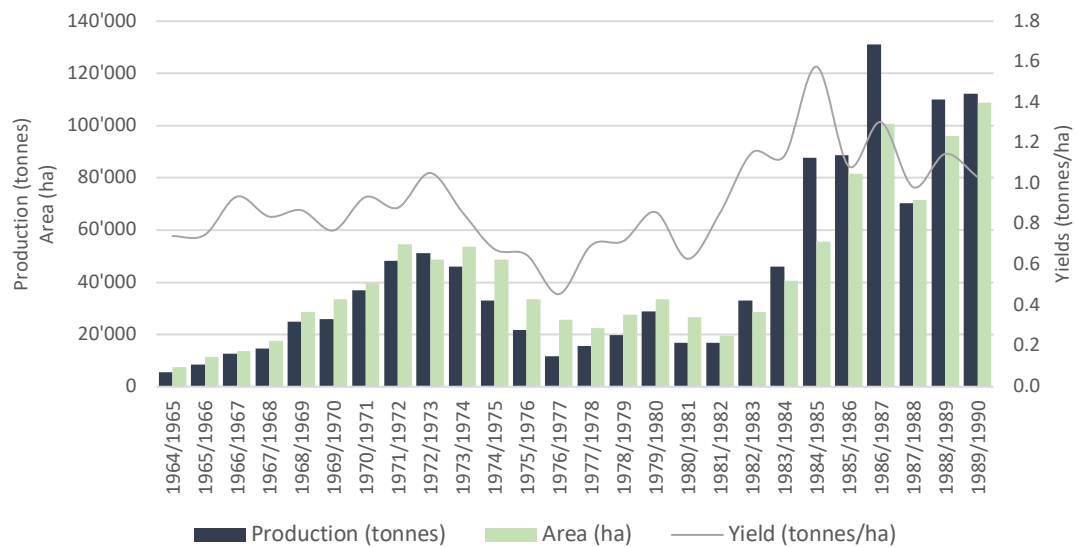
the regime re-established the previous integrated system and merged all state-owned cotton companies into one: the Société Nationale de Promotion Agricole, SONAPRA. Only rural extension services remained separate and continued to be managed by the CARDERs (Kpadé and Boinon, 2011; Sinzogan et al., 2007). SONAPRA brought together all other services, from the provision of inputs to collection, marketing, ginning, and export. In addition, the company became responsible for managing the price stabilisation fund. The fund had been set up by the CFDT and served to protect the purchase price of seed cotton from oscillations in the price of cotton on the international market. By bringing the fund management under SONAPRA's structure, the project sought to reduce the mismanagement that had left the CARDERs and SONAGRI with considerable debts (World Bank, 1982). Since that course correction, the cotton sector consisted of an organised industry with a guaranteed purchase price, through which farmers could access the agricultural inputs they needed but were without the means to acquire. As a result of the reorganisation of the sector and the greater availability of fertilisers promoted by the World Bank projects, cotton production increased considerably (see figure 6). Additionally, cotton became inescapable for both the government and farmers (Nansounon, 2012). The arrangements put in place in that decade endured and consolidated patterns of relationships between actors of the cotton sector that remained until the moment I carried out this research.⁸

Paradoxically, while the cotton sector demonstrated some strength – resisting the oversupply crisis of 1984–85 that drew down most of the stabilisation fund – Kérékou's regime became progressively unable to sustain alliances. Additionally, the country was undergoing a profound economic crisis in other sectors. The public sector never stopped growing (Kérékou promised a job for every graduate in the country) (Allen, 1992a), and the oil glut of 1982 made Nigeria close its borders, preventing both legal and illegal trade with Benin. The closing of the borders considerably reduced customs revenue, which composed the main source of cash for the government, since Benin had prioritised re-export of goods from and to its neighbours instead of investing in national production (Igue and Soule, 1992). Hence, the good levels of cotton production were not enough to circumvent a drastic reduction of export revenues that affected the government's ability to pay the public debt (Zekpa and Dossou, 1989; Nwajiaku, 1994). Consequently, the crisis reduced the capacity of the regime to co-opt both old and new elites and thus hindered the postcolonial pact that provided political stability based upon clientelism and patronage (Bierschenk, 2009, p.343; Vittin, 1991,

⁸ See appendix A.7 for a detailed explanation of the functioning of the cotton sector in 2018.

p.109). Kérékou was progressively losing the support of all factions, including the army, and simultaneously the dissident groups were making pro-democratisation alliances. According to Morency-Laflamme (2015), elite factionalism and large numbers of ‘passive allies’ were decisive factors in the calling of the National Conference that would provide the basis for the democratic transition. At this point, even Kérékou had declared his support for political reform (Banégas, 2003; Estabilet, 1997; Gisselquist, 2008; Morency-Laflamme, 2015).

Figure 6: Cotton production, area cultivated, and yields from 1964 to 1990



Source: Own elaboration with data from Levrat (2009) and Ton (2004)

3.3. The multiplication of agents in the field after the democratic transition and the liberalisation of the cotton sector

The National Conference of the Active Forces of the Nation⁹ held in 1990 was the first and most successful of its kind to be organised among French-speaking African countries (Gisselquist, 2008; Heilbrunn, 1993; Robinson, 1994). The conference marked Benin’s ‘democratic renewal’; it gathered representatives from the very different social categories and established the rules for the elections to be held in 1991. Kérékou ran but lost the presidential ballot in the second round to Nicéphore Soglo. Benin’s experience is considered an example of democratic transition, being at once the only conference to overthrow a former dictator (Heilbrunn, 1993); an outcome of non-violent resistance (Bayer, 2018); and leading to democracy being widely accepted by the population as the best system of governance (90%

⁹ Suggested translation of Conférence Nationale des Forces Vives de la Nation.

of interviewees) and preferred over any other kind of government by 70% of interviewees in 2005 (Gisselquist, 2008; IREEP, 2005).

The democratic transition might have been exemplary, but national politics remained characterised by clientelism and supported by the patronage networks of before and during the regime, in which material benefits were closely related to access to political power (Banégas, 2003; Bierschenk, 2009). The exercise of power and its representations corresponded to traditional features, to a specific moral economy of power in which clientelist distribution is a civic virtue and a principle of democratic legitimacy (Banégas, 1998, 2003). While the Beninese people seized the promise of democracy, the cotton sector was cut loose from the public sphere, becoming an experimental field for liberalisation.

A vast programme of privatisation was intertwined with democratisation. In the agricultural sector, the strategy of the main international partners went from the support to state-led input supply to pushing for the adoption of neoliberal reforms (Fok, 2010; Morris et al., 2007). The cotton sector in Benin became a ‘laboratory’ for a deep reorganisation, unlike any other in West African cotton-producing countries (Fok, 2010; Kpadé and Boinon, 2011), leading to, once again, a reshuffling of the positions in the field with the arrival of new agents. The first component to be privatised was the supply of agrochemicals in 1992 (Salé et al., 2003). Ginning and commercialisation would be opened progressively from 1995 by auctioning SONAPRA’s ginning plants and authorising the building of new ones by private companies. The World Bank, in particular, supported the transition towards a market economy through the fragmentation of the integrated system. Such were the objectives of the last two World Bank provincial rural development projects, while a broader Agricultural Services Restructuring Project (1991–2000) would complete this process.

In this emerging configuration, France’s position remained distant from the overall management of the sector but the country kept financing cotton research – a branch of activity that the French never ceased to support despite the retreat of the CFDT in the late 1970s. The National Agricultural Research Institute (INRAB), created in 1992, became the main beneficiary of French intervention in the agricultural sector (see table 4 for a summary of cotton projects in that period). As we shall see in subsequent chapters, three projects implemented in the period 1996 to 2006 – PARAB (1996–2000), PADSE (1998–2005), and PARCOB (2001–2006) – made a major contribution to developing the technical capacity of the Cotton and Fibre Research Centre (CRA-CF), the branch of the INRAB specialising in cotton.

Table 4: Cotton projects from 1996 to 2001

PERIOD OF IMPLEMENTATION	PROJECT TITLE	DONOR/ PROVIDER	OBJECTIVE
1996–2000	Support to Benin's Agricultural Research (PARAB) <i>Projet d'Appui à la Recherche Agricole au Bénin</i>	France	To support cotton research development
1998–2005	Benin Organic Cotton Project (BOCP)	The Netherlands	To promote organic cotton production in Benin
1998–2005	Farming Systems Improvement and Diversification Programme (PADSE) <i>Projet d'Amélioration et Diversification des Systèmes d'Exploitation</i>	France	To help farmers prepare and implement changes in their production systems and adapt to changes in their environment
2001–2006	Cotton Research Support Project (PARCOB) <i>Projet d'Appui à la Recherche Cotonnière au Bénin</i>	France	To support cotton plant breeding programme in Benin

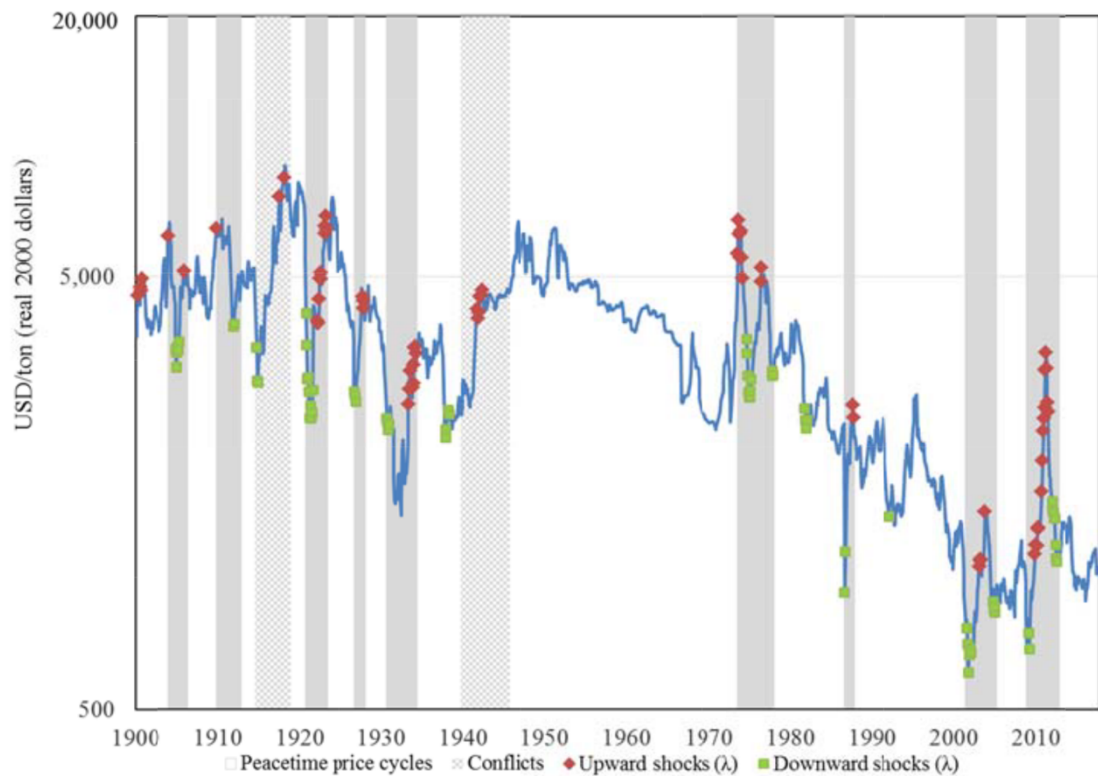
On the organisational side, the arrival of multiple private actors in input supply and ginning operations overwhelmed the sector. As a consequence, with the dismantling of the integrated system, the need for coordination became apparent. In 1999, cotton growers and ginners' private associations agreed, backed by the government, to create the Association Interprofessionnelle du Coton (AIC) (Ton, 2004; Saisonou, 2015, 2008). The AIC is a private association composed of the three main segments of the sector: ginners, cotton growers, and input suppliers (the relations between which I examine in later chapters). The main objective of the AIC is to ensure the production of seed cotton through the effective supply of agrochemicals, collection, and transport, and the commercialisation of seed cotton, from the farms to the ginneries. The AIC is also responsible for negotiating subsidies with the state and defining the technical itinerary along with the INRAB/CRA-CF. As a result, the AIC became an important agent in the cotton sector, while the role of the state diminished.

The progressive liberalisation of the cotton sector continued without decisive intervention from the government. Cotton production was increasing regularly, with continued expansion of cultivated areas. Private ginners, input suppliers, farmers, and the country as a whole benefited from favourable conditions in the world market, helped by the CFA Franc devaluation in 1994. Between 1994 and 1998, export of cotton lint doubled in volume and value, while the price of Beninese lint increased by 19 per cent (Ton, 2004). Similarly, the purchase price of seed cotton paid to farmers also doubled, from XOF 100 to XOF 225. As a result, cotton became more and more important for the country's trade balance and farmers' cash economy. In 1998, cotton exports accounted for 76 per cent of total

merchandise export value (INSAE, 2019). It was also cultivated by 35 per cent of farmers and by 68 per cent of those living in the northern departments (Minot et al., 2001). Cotton constituted a reliable source of cash and an entry point for accessing agrochemicals that could be applied to food crops. This also means that cotton became an important social good in the villages, in particular in the Northern departments. Mongbo (1995) and Nansounon (2012) demonstrate that cotton contributed to generate social structures in the village, such as cooperatives and markets, as well as the linkages between the state and village economy and politics. Accordingly, rural living conditions improved in the 1990s, particularly for cotton growers, who benefited from the devaluation of the CFA Franc and the expansion of the sector (Alia et al., 2017; Minot et al., 2001; Siaens and Wodon, 2008).

However, the growing dependence of farmers on cotton showed its risks in 2001, when the price in the world market reached its lowest levels since the Great Depression (Baffes, 2005). Cotton prices, like other commodities, present a downward secular trend (Harvey et al., 2010), illustrated in figure 7 below. The decrease in cotton prices averaged 0.2 per cent per annum between 1960 and 1984 and accelerated to 0.9 per cent between 1985 and 2002 (EC, 2004). Minot et al. (2001) estimate that the 39 per cent decline in 2001 resulted in a reduction in the rural per capita income of Beninese cotton farmers of seven per cent in the short run, and five to six per cent in the long run (Minot et al., 2001, p.465). Indebted farmers abandoned the sector while others diversified their production and remained within the sector because of the production system still depended on cotton for accessing fertilizers (Alidou and Niehof, 2013). Meanwhile, the price of agrochemicals increased more than the price of purchase of seed cotton. Input suppliers were unable to distribute fertilisers and herbicides via the formal networks before the start of the season. This situation encouraged the creation of 'breakaway networks' for input supply, along with the commercialisation of seed cotton (Salé et al., 2003; Sinzogan et al., 2007). The recently created AIC proved unable to coordinate the several providers of fertilisers and the growing number of private ginners.

Figure 7: The long-term decline of cotton prices in the world market from 1900 to 2017



Source: MacDonald and Meyer (2018, p.13)

In this context of crisis, development projects again became relevant. The World Bank Cotton Sector Reform project (PARFC, 2003–2008) aimed to increase productivity and efficiency through a successful transition from a monopolistic production system to a system based on competition (World Bank, 2008, p.3). The main component was to provide support to the AIC in organising the sector and to help the association in concluding the privatisation of SONAPRA's ginning plants. Alongside this, a French project, PARSC (2004–2009), was a complement to the PARFC. It focussed on providing training and funding for AIC staff to develop an internal communication unit. Table 5 presents main aspects of both projects.

Table 5: Projects in support of the AIC at the beginning of the 2000s

PERIOD OF IMPLEMENTATION	PROJECT TITLE	DONOR/ PROVIDER	OBJECTIVE
2003–2008	Cotton Sector Reform (PARFC) <i>Projet d'Appui à la Réforme de la Filière Coton</i>	World Bank	To increase cotton sector productivity and efficiency through a successful transition from a monopolistic production system to a system based on competition
2004–2009	Support for the Cotton Sector Reform Project (PARSC) <i>Projet d'Appui à la Réforme du Secteur du Coton</i>	France	To support the AIC and the development of a high-performing sector co-managed by different actors

While these projects supported the AIC and its coordination role, the continued decrease in prices in the world market since the mid-1990s exposed the vulnerabilities of cotton in the international trade architecture. It came to light that subsidies for farmers in developed cotton-producing countries were creating distortions in the global market. In particular, this concerned US subsidies, with the US accounting for 30 per cent of world cotton exports in 2001/02 (Watkins, 2002). In that cropping season, US cotton subsidies amounted to 3.9 billion dollars, causing a loss of 1.4 per cent of GDP and of nine per cent of export earnings in Benin (Watkins, 2002). In this context, while Brazil (another major world producer of cotton) opened consultations on US cotton subsidies, starting a dispute settlement process, Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Chad, the biggest African cotton producing countries, came together and created the C4 group to voice their claims at the World Trade Organization (WTO). Cotton became a 'hot topic' at the WTO during the organisation's fifth Ministerial Conference held in Cancún, Mexico, in 2003. Representatives from the C4 requested the end of subsidies and support from the international community for the development of their cotton sectors (OECD/SWAC, 2006, p.26). Paragraph 27 of the Conference's final declaration suggests a sectoral initiative on cotton, in which WTO members 'recognise the importance of cotton for the development of a number of developing countries and understand the need for urgent action to address trade distortions in these markets' (WTO, 2003, p.6). The declaration also invites the Director General to consult with development partners 'to direct programmes toward diversification of the economies where cotton accounts for the major share of their GDP' (WTO, 2003, p.6).

Subsequently, the number of projects in the cotton sector in Benin exploded in the 2000s, with eighteen projects being signed in less than fifteen years, once again transforming the structure of the cotton sector. Indeed, the upsurge of projects meant the arrival of new partners in a sector where France and the World Bank had long been dominant. Germany and the United States became major actors, with the projects USAID-WACIP, USAID-C4CP, and COMPACI leaving a solid footprint in the hosting context, as we shall see. The post-2004 period also saw SSC acquire a strong momentum with projects from China, who had surpassed the US as world's largest producer of cotton, India, second world producer, Brazil, and Turkey.

When the wave of projects coming from Cancún arrived in Benin (see table 6), both the cotton sector and projects were very different from their predecessors. Projects were more specific, and the cotton sector had a consolidated private and public national elite that bargained for its control.

Table 6: Cotton projects post-2004

PERIOD OF IMPLEMENTATION	PROJECT TITLE	DONOR/ PROVIDER	OBJECTIVE
2006–2010	Cotton Made in Africa (CmiA)	Germany	To improve the living conditions of African smallholders and promote environmentally friendly cotton production
2006–2013	Cotton Producers Organisations Strengthening Programme (PROCOTON) <i>Programme de Renforcement des Organisations des Producteurs de Coton</i>	The Netherlands + SNV	To contribute to the sustainable improvement of the cotton sector in general and producers' groups in particular
2006–2009	Cotton Sector Competitiveness Improvement <i>Amélioration de la Compétitivité du Secteur Coton</i>	The Netherlands + IFDC	To develop and promote improved technologies to fight soil depletion in cotton producing systems
2006–2013	West African Cotton Improvement Programme (WACIP)	United States USAID + IFDC	To strengthen small farmers' capacity to reduce poverty through improving management of resources
2007–2013	Support for Textile Cotton Sector Project (PAFICOT) <i>Projet d'Appui à la Filière Coton Textile</i>	AfDB	To contribute to reducing poverty in rural areas through sustainable improvement of cotton subsector productivity
2009–2013	Support to Cotton Sector in C4 Countries (C4-Brazil)	Brazil	To contribute to improving competitiveness in the cotton supply chain of African partner countries
2009–2012	Competitive African Cotton Initiative (COMPACI)	Germany	To help smallholder farmers to increase their productivity of cotton, therefore increasing their income and improving their living conditions
2011–2014	Cotton and Organic Cotton around Protected Areas (CAP Bio) <i>Coton et Cultures Biologiques autour des Aires Protégées</i>	Switzerland (Helvetas)	To improve the living conditions of the population living around the natural reserves while protecting the environment
2012–2017	Support to Cotton Production in Benin	China	To support Benin in agricultural technologies, in having access to Chinese market, and in selling inputs and equipment
2012–2017	Cotton Technical Assistance Programme for Africa (TAP Cotton)	India	To strengthen the competitiveness of cotton value chains by facilitating transfer of knowledge and technology from India
2013–2015	COMPACI phase II	Germany	To contribute to improving the livelihoods of smallholder cotton farmers
2013–2015	Cotton Farming Project	Turkey	To support cotton production in Benin through training and provision of equipment
2014–2017	CAP Bio II	Switzerland (Helvetas)	To improve the living conditions of the population living around the natural reserves while protecting the environment
2013–2016	Integrated Management of Cotton Pests (GIRCOT)	CORAF/WECARD	To strengthen the capacities of cotton growers on staggered pest control

	<i>Gestion Intégrée des Ravageurs par les Traitements sur Seuil et le Fractionnement des Récoltes pour une Production Cotonnière Durable en Afrique de l'Ouest</i>		
2014–2018	Four Country Cotton Partnership (C4CP)	United States USAID + IFDC	To improve food security in targeted zones of C4 countries
2014–2018	Technological Strengthening and Dissemination of Good Agricultural Practices for Cotton in C4 Countries and Togo (C4+Togo)	Brazil	To contribute to increased competitiveness in cotton value chains in C4 countries and Togo
2015–2016	Technical Innovation and Africanisation of Cotton Farming Sustainability Indicators (ITK Aid-cotton) <i>Innovations Techniques et Africanisation des Indicateurs de Durabilité de la Culture du Coton</i>	France + EU	To sustainably improve competitiveness, value added, and viability of African cotton sectors
2017–2019	Support to Agro-ecological Transition in Cotton Producing Areas (TAZCO) <i>Projet d'Appui à la Transition Agro-Écologique des Zones Cotonnières du Bénin</i>	France	To improve the incomes of family farms in the cotton producing areas of Benin

3.4. The emergence of a national private cotton elite

The story of the liberalisation of the cotton sector and the emergence of a national private cotton elite is also Patrice Talon's story. In the 1980s, Patrice Talon, born in Abomey, was living in France, where he decided to join the import/export business with West African countries. In 1985, he founded the Société de Distribution Intercontinentale (SDI), specialising in the supply of agrochemicals to West African countries. In 1987, his company won SONAPRA's call for bids to supply agrochemicals to cotton growers in Benin. His business grew progressively and when the state opened ginning activities to the private sector, Talon submitted a bid for three new factories, which he won along with other national entrepreneurs. Eight new ginneries opened between 1994 and 1997, while SONAPRA's ginning factories (ten in total) were being progressively auctioned off. At the AIC, although he never became president of the board, '[Talon's] voice was preponderant; when he speaks, no one speaks, since he alone controlled the biggest share of the sector, even among

ginners'.¹⁰ Throughout the 2000s, Talon bought shares in SONAPRA's ginning factories and was the only bidder for acquiring them all. With thirteen ginneries and the control of the input supply market, Talon became Benin's king of cotton.

The importance of cotton in the Beninese economy put Talon in an influential position at the highest level of the state. Thomas Boni Yayi was elected President of the Republic in 2006, openly supported by Talon. Boni Yayi's promise was to reinvigorate the sector by providing high-quality inputs – agrochemicals and seeds – and reaching a total 600,000 tonnes of seed cotton per year (Saizonou, 2015). At the beginning of the 2000s, the fluctuations in the price of cotton on the international market prevented the AIC and the government from fixing the purchase price at the beginning of the cropping season, constantly calling growers' representatives to renegotiations. Falling prices on the international market trickled down to farmers, leading hundreds of thousands of farmers to become indebted and subsequently opting out of the sector. The ongoing crisis led to a vertiginous drop in production in 2005/06 – from 427,159 tonnes in 2004/05 to 190,886 tonnes the following year (AIC, 2017). Boni Yayi's promises required a deep restructuring of the sector and of the then weakened AIC. In 2007, Boni Yayi decided not to renew the framework agreement between the government and the AIC, practically suppressing the private association and, by extension, bringing an end to his alliance with Talon.

In the AIC's place, Boni Yayi created a Transitioning Committee to manage the sector and to organise the call for tenders for the import and distribution of agrochemicals (World Bank, 2008; Saizonou, 2015). Surprisingly, the Committee awarded the tender to SONAPRA, who had been barred from tenders since 1999, and to the Caisse Centrale d'Achats d'Intrants (CAI), a new state company run by public officials close to the president. However, none of these companies was able to provide the inputs to growers on time.

The CEO of SONAPRA called the whole world, practically. He went to Estonia, in almost every country where you could find inputs. But he failed to find a single gram of fertiliser! He did not have a gram of input that could cost the price he had offered... There was therefore a total difficulty for [the 2007] cropping season. In May, there was not yet a gram of input into the territory, as the cropping season started in June. The situation was completely blocked. They did not know what to do. And at the Ministers' Council, Yayi Boni asked how to get out of this, and he was told: there is only one person who can save Benin, there is only one person, no one can do it but Talon. Nobody else!¹¹

¹⁰ AIC#8, 18/04/2018.

¹¹ AIC#8, 18/04/2018.

In May 2007, the government decided to concede and asked for help from Talon, who retained enough fertiliser in his warehouses to save the cropping season. It is not clear whether he anticipated the situation or not, but he agreed to provide his stock under certain conditions: the re-establishment of the AIC, the reopening of SONAPRA's privatisation process, the full engagement of the state in recovering the sector, and the privatisation of the CAI. In July 2008, Talon's recently created ginning company, SODECO, acquired the totality of SONAPRA's shares. Thus the liberalisation process led to the concentration of the sector in the hands of one businessperson.

In this context, the donor community – which had grown as a result of the increase in the number of cotton projects post-2004 – created a specific task force to 'analyse the ongoing reforms and react to the requests from the government and cotton stakeholders' (Wennink et al., 2013, p.24). The task force succeeded in shaping the new approach to the development of the cotton sector that the government released in January 2009, following the reconciliation and re-establishment of the AIC. The Association launched in that same year the Sanitation and Recovery Project for the Cotton Sector¹² (PARFCB) to reinvigorate the cotton sector, direct funded from the national budget, without donor's commitment.

However, Talon's project for the revival of the cotton sector was unsuccessful in the long run. National production struggled to reach pre-crisis levels and even dropped to 136,958 tonnes in 2010/11. On 29 April 2012, Boni Yayi's administration suppressed the AIC and re-established SONAPRA, requisitioning SODECO's ginneries and delegating to the public company the overall administration of the cotton sector and the provision of inputs. The rupture between Boni Yayi and Talon marks the apex of the crisis in an affair that includes misappropriation of public funds, attempted poisoning, and exile in France (Duhem, 2012; Zoumènou, 2012; 'Bénin : le talon d'Achille de Boni Yayi', 2012; 'Bénin : Patrice Talon, itinéraire d'un ambitieux devenu paria', 2012; Grogga-Bada, 2013; Boko, 2016; Duhem, 2016b; Michel, 2016; Duhem, 2016a). In 2016, Talon made his great return to the country as a candidate for the presidency. He was elected president at the expense of Yayi Boni's candidate, former prime minister Lionel Zinsou. In the first month of his term, Talon re-established the AIC and allowed his company, SODECO, to retake control of the ginneries (Duhem, 2016a).

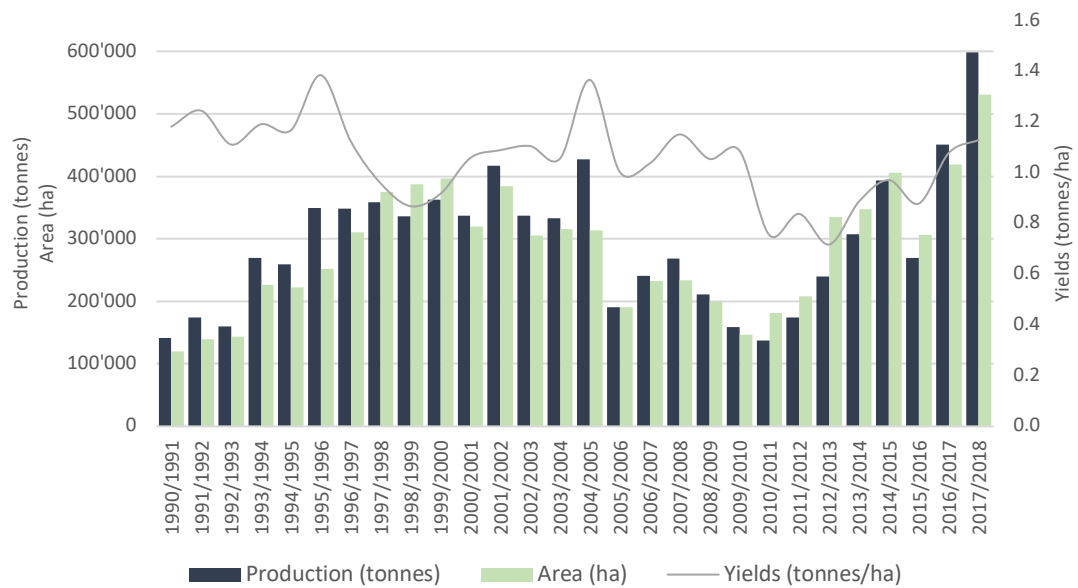
¹² In French, *Projet d'Assainissement et Relance de la Filière Coton au Bénin* (AIC, 2009).

Since 2016, Talon's group has controlled all activities within the cotton sector – except production, to a certain extent – monopolising the supply of inputs, the collection and processing of raw cotton, and the export of cotton lint. The ICA-Group and SODECO owns 16 out of 18 ginning factories in Benin – and the other two sell their quota to SODECO. This means that Talon's companies process and export all the cotton that is produced in the country. As the president, he also has control over the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries (MAEP) and its Direction of Agriculture, who authorise the technical itinerary stipulating the way farmers grow cotton and the quantity of fertilisers they should buy, and INRAB's cotton research.¹³

Despite the recovery in the period when the AIC was on hold, cotton production never reached Yayi Boni's promised goal of 600,000 tonnes during his years in office. However, following the reorganisation of the sector from 2016 under Talon, production reached 598,000 tonnes in the 2017/18 cropping season. According to stakeholders, the success of the cropping season had little to do with an innovative agricultural technique, the object of most development projects. The national record was due to the effective and timely distribution of inputs and collection of seed cotton. In addition, the effective organisation of the 2016/17 cropping season attracted more farmers to join the cotton sector, increasing considerably the areas planted with cotton. Indeed, the increase in production in this season is a consequence of the expansion of fields, rather than improvements in productivity, since the national average yield remained around 1.1 tonnes per hectare. Figure 8 below shows the evolution of cotton production and area cultivated in Benin since the beginning of the liberalisation of the sector in 1990.

¹³ See Appendix A.7. for details about the ITK and its formulation.

Figure 8: Cotton production, area cultivated, and yields from 1990 to 2018



Source: Own elaboration with data from Levrat (2009), Ton (2004), AIC (2017), and Quin-Ouro (2018a)

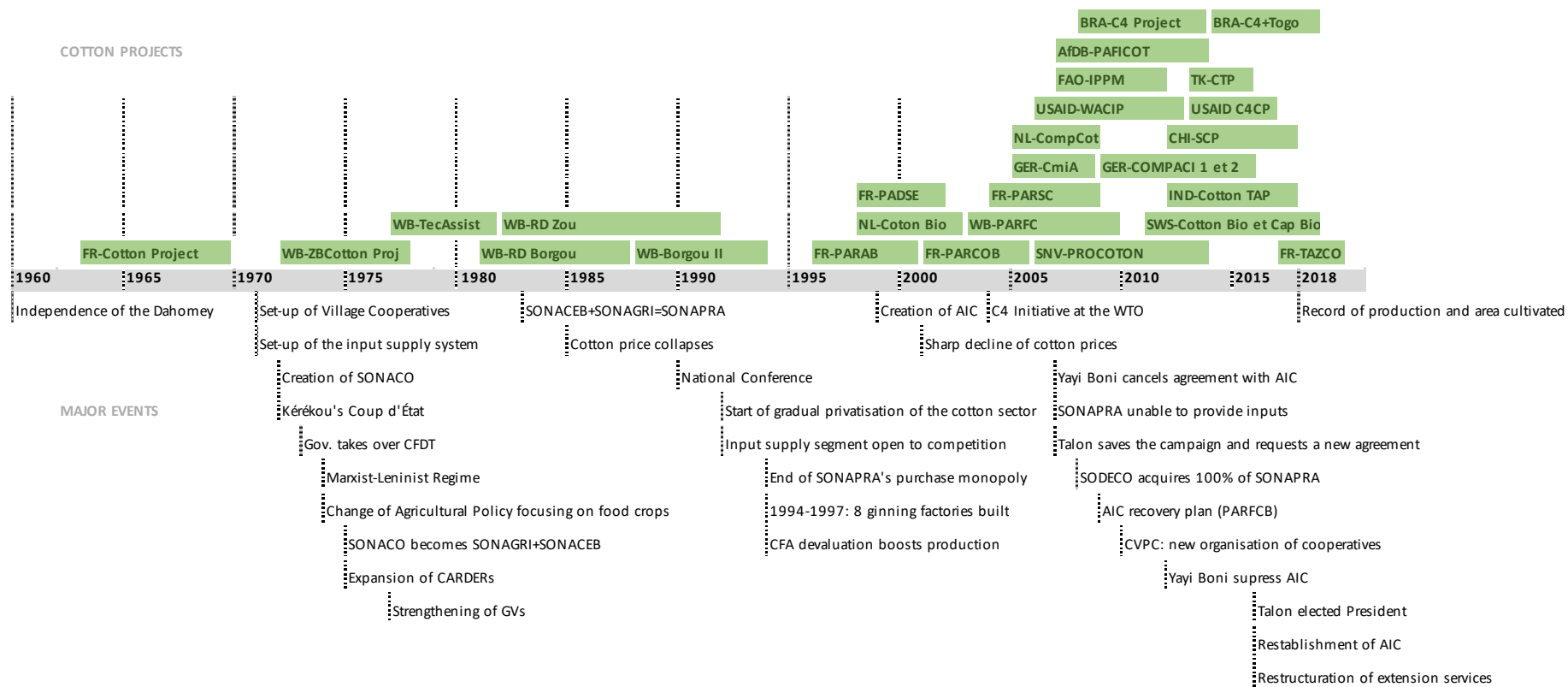
Conclusion

This chapter has presented the development of the cotton sector in Benin since independence. The process of consolidation of the cotton sector as a social field shows that the positions of actors have changed through time, but also that projects have been a regular part of it. In the beginning, foreign partners governed the field through projects, creating the rules, defining practices, and reaping the benefits. Changes in other overlapping fields affected that structure. After years of political instability, the state took control of the cotton sector, imposing different arrangements and practices as it occupied the centre of the field. These arrangements did not last, and development partners again occupied a dominant position. If cotton projects strengthened public power at first, projects promoted liberalisation and therefore a new structuration of the field later on. This analysis has shown that Benin hosted many projects that had varying amounts of weight in shaping the development of the cotton sector. Figure 8 below illustrates the evolution of the number of projects and major events. The trajectory of projects also shows how connected or disconnected from the context and from international dynamics, such as fluctuations in the cotton price and initiatives in the international arena such as the C4, these projects can be.

Given this background, I next turn my focus to the ways in which the host context came to incorporate project components in the constitution of the cotton sector. I begin in the next chapter by locating and distinguishing project components in the cotton sector. In chapters

5 and 6, I focus on how these components became part of the repertoire of institutional bricolage.

Figure 9: Timeline of cotton projects and major national events



Author's own illustration

CHAPTER 4. THE WEIGHT AND DISTINCTION OF PROJECT INSTITUTIONS IN THE HOST CONTEXT

As observed in chapter 3, the cotton sector has been the object of struggle for various actors throughout the years. Amongst this, development projects were regularly present and became part of the history of cotton in Benin. Since independence, foreign support took the shape of development aid that lived through the Leninist-Marxist regime of Kérékou, and beyond the progressive liberalisation that started in the 1990s. This history also shows that both the cotton sector and development projects have changed through time. However, the role of projects in these changes remains unclear.

Although projects and cotton alike seem to have failed in making Benin a major world producer and cotton a consistent route out of poverty, it seems unlikely that projects have had no effect whatsoever in this context. Project evaluations assess the success or failure of projects on purely managerial indicators, such as timely implementation, disbursements, number of beneficiaries, etc., which reflect more the life of a project than its effects on the broader context. In other words, project assessments are project-centred (or donor-centred, as suggested by Manning et al., 2020). A context-centred approach could provide a different account of the effects of development cooperation throughout history. This involves leaving aside the success-failure binary and adopting a different perspective, observing projects from the point of view of host actors who navigate from one project to the other.

From a historical perspective, project experiences, although ad hoc, constitute layers of experience that compose the repertoire of practices on which actors can draw to react to everyday challenges. In this chapter I focus on project experiences as a piece of the institutional repertoire. In the first section, I explore the life trajectories of key informants to locate and weigh project experiences. From there, I analyse the distinctive features of projects in comparison with other enduring institutions of the host context. In chapters 6 and 7, I explore where, by whom, and under what conditions project pieces are being re-used.

4.1. Project footprints in life trajectories

As a project manager myself, I had only known the host context through the lenses of projects, from within project arrangements. Somehow, while implementing or evaluating projects, my perception of the context appeared as a *mise en scène*. When I arrived in Benin to conduct field research, I was eager to observe the backstage area, the everyday life of project beneficiaries when they were not acting as ‘beneficiaries’ of any project. The idea was to identify, in their everyday practices and in prevailing institutional arrangements, the

footprints of past experiences in cotton projects. I was curious to know what happens behind the curtains of projects, and what elements there have been taken from the ‘onstage’ area. I first realised that projects did not appear to be as present in people’s lives as the volume and value of projects had led me to naïvely expect. I found out the different weight of projects, both across multiple groups of actors and within each one of them. I confirmed the assumption I had that ginners barely get involved, while nevertheless being a group of actors it is impossible to dismiss given their importance in the value chain and their influence within the AIC. The ginners I interviewed overlooked development projects or were not even acquainted with their dynamics. Likewise, high-level AIC and MAEP staff placed projects in a marginalised slot in their agenda, recognising them but not fully engaging with project activities, and even less with projects results past the period of implementation.¹⁴ This heavily contrasted with the narratives one can find in project documents, with the desired objectives and expectations of donors and providers that they will change the whole sector. In this section, I provide a different account of project stories by sharing the life trajectories of actors within the cotton sector who have been, in different degrees, involved in project activities. Their stories contribute to situating and weighing project experiences in their life trajectories. From their experiences, I also draw some common features of projects that sustain the project-context mismatch and that I examine in the second part of this chapter.

4.1.1. George, a cotton farmer who is open to innovation but rarely participates in project activities

Although farmers are the main and largest group of actors in the cotton sector and the designated final beneficiaries of projects, they do not get as involved in project activities as CRA-CF researchers and extension agents. The majority of cotton farmers who responded to the questionnaire (147 out of 208) had never participated in a project activity, while many others were not sure, and only one sixth of them remembered attending training (mostly on farm activities) provided by a development partner. Strategic meetings and country visits remained the kind of activities reserved for researchers and extension agents.

¹⁴ During an interview with a high-level AIC staff member, I asked about a certain project that it was claimed had worked with the AIC. The interviewee suddenly interrupted me to call his assistant: he had just remembered that that project was organising the final restitution workshop that same day and that he needed to respond to the invitation with a letter saying he could not attend. He looked at me and thanked me for reminding him of that activity, which he considered important, something he would attend if he did not have other things to do.

I met George during a tour with CRA-CF researchers in the Alibori department. In his fields, he hosts a demonstration plot that the CRA-CF uses to try out varieties of cotton. It was not easy to access his farm. We met him standing on the side of a gravel road, somewhere south of Kérou, waiting for us. He came into the vehicle with us and showed the way. After a short while he indicated that we should turn right and we entered the bush. We were going very slowly and it was shaky because of the dry land and ridges. Big cashew trees also posed a challenge for the driver, who had to find ways to circumvent them. About ten minutes later we saw the first fields of cotton. There we stopped. 'Now we have to go by foot.' We walked for fifteen minutes more among cotton plants. George had just finished harvesting, but the plants were still standing there, devoid of leaves and flowers. After a while, we saw his house, in the middle of the bush, a small building surrounded by a clear space where chickens and guinea fowls were kept. A cow was lying down under a tree not far away. As is common in the north of Benin when a guest arrives, George offered us water from the well in a big cup from which we all drank. Finally, he took us to the demonstration plot, situated a ten-minute walk from his house. We were all impressed by his fields of cotton. It was the end of the day and we had visited many other fields in the region, but none as tall and well managed as his. The CRA-CF team was excited by the idea of getting reliable results for their research. George was also very happy: it had been a good year. We exchanged phone numbers and agreed that we would meet again soon. When we were on our way back to the vehicle, George ran after us holding a live chicken in his hands. 'This is for your dinner and to thank you for coming.' A few months later, I met with George in Parakou. He had just received the final payment from the AIC and had bought a brand-new motorbike. We talked for a while and a few weeks later we met again in Kérou, the main village of his district.

George had started farming cotton about six years before we met. Before that, he grew other crops, such as maize and soy, while his father was responsible for the cotton fields. Because of the crisis of production in the 2000s, his family stopped growing cotton, until Boni Yayi reinvigorated the sector by cancelling the debts of the farmers. From that time on, George became responsible for the family business. He grows cotton because 'cotton comes with advantages... with cotton, they bring us the inputs we need. Without cotton, we can't buy fertilisers because we need to pay cash, but with cotton we take it first and then one pays with the harvest.'

In 2018, George cultivated eighteen hectares of cotton – which puts him among the biggest cotton farmers of Benin. A portion of the cotton fertiliser he gets through credit is used in food crops – he also grows soy, maize, yam, and beans. Access to the input credit system

and the reallocation of fertiliser from cotton to food crops are the main motivation to continue in the cotton sector. If there were other crop chains with the same structure, he would opt for maize because

it is very hard work to grow cotton. You need to make a lot to earn something, at least ten hectares... If you make two hectares, you will have debts... If we make cotton, it is because we don't have a choice... If you grow maize, how are you going to do it? You don't have the money to pay, we don't have cash... It is hard... If we could find fertilisers through maize, we would do maize, it is easier than cotton and we cannot eat cotton.

Despite this pragmatic relation with cotton, George took it seriously, as his farming output attested. He is one of those farmers that CRA-CF researchers and extension agents call 'farmers who are open to innovation'. The demonstration plot he hosts keeps him directly connected with cotton researchers and with agricultural techniques he would otherwise only access through the scarce rural extension service. In exchange, CRA-CF researchers recommend George when projects are looking for participants. 'It is a way of paying them back', an agronomist told me after our visit.

In spite of being a model farmer, George has only attended one training session within a project structure, organised by the GIZ.

It was in 2013... or 2014, or 2015... I don't remember... they taught us how to plan, how to spend our money... I mean, they told us to write down what you put in your field as expenses, so one can know at the end if one has gained or lost... if you don't write it down, you will never know if it is profitable.

This experience emerged as an important but isolated event in his life, inasmuch as he did not adopt the management instructions he received. By contrast, in the exchanges we had had previously, he had said he applied different conservation agriculture techniques, some of which had only been shared by development projects. Indeed, for a couple of seasons at the time of our interview, George had been building compost pits, which he fills with the old cotton plants and with animal dung. He learnt this from the CARDER and the AIC, whose agents used his fields to demonstrate the technique to the farmers of the village. This was part of the AIC's programme for the intensification of production, launched in 2017. Following the training, he adopted the technique and has had good results. Yet George also acknowledged the difficulties and the reasons many of the people who came to the demonstration at his field did not adopt it: 'because it is difficult, and they lack material and livestock'. In his case, despite the satisfactory outputs, the organic fertiliser he gets from the compost pit is far from being enough for his needs.

George's experience in the cotton sector demonstrates that cotton is an option by default even for the biggest farmers. Often, the biggest producers are also the ones who occupy leadership positions in the cooperatives, who are open to innovation, and who are well connected to extension agents and researchers. This suggests that farmers like George are the most prone to get involved in development projects. However, projects remain a marginal experience in his life. It is a distinguishable one, but innovations reach the field predominantly through the prevailing structures, such as the CARDER, the AIC and the CRA-CF.

4.1.2. Gildas, a rural extension agent under pressure

Gildas became a Vegetal Production Advisor (CPV) in 2007. Although his position requires him to provide advice on all crops, he has always worked in cotton-producing districts. He comes from the Donga department but has had most of his experience in the 2KP, having worked in the three districts that give the name to the region: Kérou, Kouandé, and Péhunco. As is the case with many of his colleagues, he has moved many times in the country, working in places in which he does not speak the local language.¹⁵ He took training to become a CPV in Parakou. This was organised by the AIC and the government through the CARDER. 'There were also some projects, such as COMPACI, WACIP too... and organic cotton' that he completed during an interview in Péhunco in February 2018. He did not see a difference amongst projects at first: 'they all run after the same objective which is how to better manage our soil to avoid depletion'. The last activity he participated in was about compost pits, 'but it was with the AIC... with a foreign partner, was with C4+Togo on something to avoid soil erosion'.

Gildas remembered well his experiences with development projects and indicated that development encounters were important in his life trajectory. As with many other extension agents who responded to the questionnaire, he has attended theoretical and on-farm training sessions, but he has not been involved in the planning of project activities, neither has he participated in a study tour abroad.

¹⁵ The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis (INSAE) identified more than sixty sociolinguistic groups in Benin in 2002. These were then organised in nine groups (Amadou Sanni and Atodjinou, 2012).

His participation in project activities made him realise that training activities provided by prevailing institutions could be better. Specifically, he criticised the way the regular workshops organised by the AIC and the MAEP lacked transparency and engagement:

When the AIC organises training, for example, they can take you from one place to the other, but they don't tell you how they are going to pay you... at the end of the activity, they just give you the money and that's it. With projects, the foreigner will tell you everything before the start of the activity, what we are going to eat, for example... And they put someone, be he foreigner or national, to supervise, to control, to see if the people are on time, if you have eaten... there is control... if you have eaten or not, eight o'clock is eight o'clock, you have to be in the room.

When Gildas organises training for the farmers he supervises, he tries to reproduce what he experienced in project initiatives by bringing some rigour to the organisation of the activity. He has some room for manoeuvre when he works with his farmers, but he still lacks appropriate resources to implement the activities that are his responsibility. For that he has 'often blamed the government for assigning a job and not providing the necessary resources'. A few times he had to pay out of his pocket for the gas he needed to visit farmers under his supervision. In addition to the lack of resources, he seemed annoyed by the way extension agents were treated by the hierarchy: 'they ask you for a job, you make it, and they don't even appreciate it... They speak with you as though you were a child that they need to educate... that is also what I hold against them'. As a consequence, Gildas 'prefers working with projects', because 'they bring the conditions that make it easier'.

However, projects also have their flaws. For Gildas, these problems relate to the misappropriation of resources:

Since 2007, the projects I have seen coming were to help us and help our parents to reduce poverty in Africa... but there is something I have always criticised: their finality. They start well, but they stop at the middle or they don't finish well... That's because we don't put the good people there... They don't attain their objective despite the money they have put into it... This means that the management of resources, both financial and human, is bad... Sincerely, I think most of the projects do not work.

However, in his opinion, the failure of projects is not the problem of projects. Gildas believes that 'a project's success depends on the government' and on the farmers' willingness to change:

when you go see a farmer and say 'I would like you to do this or that', he immediately says 'how much are you going to give me?'... So you bring an innovation and he resists... only when he sees a neighbour doing it and getting the benefits, they run after you... but at first, they are very sceptical.

As an extension agent, projects also go through him to recruit project participants. Gildas is well connected to CRA-CF researchers and part of a selected group of agents who are often called on to attend project activities and to recommend farmers who are ‘open to innovation’. However, projects are intermittent experiences in Gildas’s life trajectory. He takes part in project activities, but they do not predominate in his day-to-day work. Because projects and ordinary activities overlap, he is able to perceive the differences between working in projects and ‘for the state’, and this shapes his opinion and criticisms of the arrangements, relationships, and practices that he observes in both domains of action.

4.1.3. Léo, a CRA-CF researcher who has seen a lot of projects come and go

CRA-CF researchers were the group of actors most connected to development projects. For many years, the Centre was the main focal point for foreign support and agricultural research and a priority for donors. All CRA-CF researchers I interviewed and who responded to the questionnaire have been involved in projects at some point in their lives. They generally participate in training, but many of them also take part in study tours abroad, and in planning and strategic meetings, and have also contributed to scientific publications and studies. They were familiar with all projects and partners and with the mechanisms of a development project.

Léo is one of these researchers who has seen many projects come and go. He had been working at the CRA-CF for more than ten years when I interviewed him for the first time in October 2017. Like many of his colleagues, he comes from a region where cotton is not predominant. He graduated in agronomic engineering from the University of Abomey-Calavi, in the surroundings of Cotonou, and worked with other crops before joining the INRAB’s cotton research centre. At the time of the interview, he was based in Parakou, but he had previously worked for the CRA-CF branch in Bohicon as well, in the central region of Benin.

When Léo arrived at the CRA-CF, the Centre was hosting PADSE (1998–2005). ‘At that moment, France had no problems, [they] had a lot of projects, unlike today.’ Léo considered PADSE a benchmark when I asked him about a project that has left a mark in his life. He told me that the technique the project introduced had a real impact on farmers’ finances, ‘since they used less pesticides’. But he also acknowledged the project’s boundaries:

There is a ‘but’ though... At that moment, the farmers were motivated. When the project was there, they followed the instructions and they would get some

money for doing that... But when the project ended, they did not have anything anymore and they ended up abandoning the technique.

Other French projects were highlighted by Léo as better examples of sustainability. PARAB (1996–2000) and PARCOB (2001–2006) provided resources to the CRA-CF to develop their own varieties of cotton. These projects focussed on strengthening the capacities of researchers. They ‘enabled [them] to work well and to have the tools to work in all domains of plant breeding’. These projects also provided scholarships for CRA-CF researchers to pursue postgraduate degrees in France.

After the end of PARCOB, ‘things got a bit tough’; the next project that came to his mind was TAZCO (2018–2021), the objective of which was to promote a transition to agroecology in cotton growing systems. Léo was convinced that the project was doomed to fail: ‘have you seen what they are doing? It is just a revival... it is sure that the people won’t adopt it’. On another day, Léo guided me in a visit to the project’s experimentation plot and criticised a tree the project team had decided to keep in the middle of the field: ‘have you ever seen anyone doing agriculture in the shade? Cut that tree down!’

Even though he disagreed with the choices that the new project had made, Léo acknowledged the French influence in Beninese agricultural research. For him, they remain the main partners in the cotton sector, in spite of the emergence of new actors from the mid-2000s. After mentioning all French projects, he finally started talking about other partners:

The French were the first partners... When the French retracted, we started cooperating with the United States through C4CP, which started with WACIP. WACIP replaced the French when they departed... and we were managing WACIP when C4-Brazil arrived.

The way he started listing the projects he knew, it sounded like Léo did not draw any distinction among them. Indeed, he mentioned that all the projects that came after the C4 initiative were ‘more or less the same’. Further on, he added: ‘you know that it is all money from the United States, right?’, making reference to the dispute between Brazil and the US over subsidies at the WTO when he mentioned Brazil’s cotton projects.

Through project support, he has travelled to several countries in the region, and to Brazil and India. Development encounters have inspired Léo’s perspectives on the future of agricultural development. The latter comprises mechanisation and intensification and implies the end of subsistence agriculture. Indeed, Léo wondered ‘when [they] will have in Benin all the machines that [he] saw last time [he] went to Brazil’, while China is a model that Léo

admires for their intensification programmes. For him, if a farmer is not willing to intensify production, 'he'd better stop growing cotton, otherwise he will remain poor forever'.

Projects were a constant in his experience as a CRA-CF staff member. When he talked about projects overall, Léo considered them as partnerships that provide an opportunity to become open-minded and to put other countries' experiences into the national perspective:

[Development cooperation] allows you to get out to see what people are doing elsewhere and to compare this with one's own experiences... it allows you to open up to the world... It is always good to be in a partnership with other people... And all of that can really help us improving our production... if we had a bit of material and if we were a bit serious.

Because of the frequency with which Léo participates in project activities, they have become part of his day-to-day life, as though there were no interruptions, with each project simply replacing another one. In this sense, the distinction between project and prevailing institutions is almost imperceptible, because projects, as many of them as there are, are part of his day-to-day activities. As we shall see in statements from cotton researchers throughout this thesis, their frequent involvement allows them to have a broader perception on the overall contribution of projects, instead of a focus on the successes and failures of a single intervention.

4.1.4. Amoussou, an AIC field coordinator who does not have a lot to say about projects

People from very distinct backgrounds compose the AIC staff. The fact that the Association has been dissolved many times since its creation in 1999 has meant that the career path of the current staff is also intermittent. Many AIC agents in the field started their career as rural extension agents in the CARDER, and many others come from the MAEP.

When I met Amoussou in November 2017, he was the AIC coordinator in an important cotton-producing district in the Alibori department. He was responsible for the coordination of 61 extension agents, who ensured that farmers followed the technical itinerary and collected data on cotton production. He has occupied that position since the beginning of 2017. Before that, he worked at the AIC's headquarters in Cotonou, until the AIC was dissolved by President Yayi Boni in 2012. In that period, Amoussou worked with the input importers' association, but decided to pass the national examination in 2012 to become one of MAEP's rural extension agent, a position he occupied in Alibori from 2012 to 2014. In 2014, he was promoted and removed to a different location, until Patrice Talon re-established the AIC in 2016 and started to engage their former agents.

Most of Amoussou's experiences with projects date from the period when he worked at the CARDER:

The AIC invite us for training in Parakou now, but I don't usually go... We participated in a training session about composting, on climate change as well... but I don't know who pays for that... In the past, I used to know the projects better... there was PAFICOT... there were many projects when I was at the CARDER... You know, in general, the decisions about projects are made at the headquarters, in Cotonou... they make the decisions and invite us to participate... I don't think I have a lot to say about projects.

His best experience with a project was with PAFICOT (2007–2013), 'because they supported us with materials, providing computers directly to the agents... they also provided vehicles to enable us to visit the farmers'. By providing material resources, which were 'necessary to undertake [their] job', the project addressed the 'practical problems in the field'.

Amoussou also mentioned several government plans and programmes that structured his previous activities. In 2017, the AIC's intensification of production programme was the strategic framework that shaped his tasks. From the perspective of the AIC, the purpose of cotton projects is to support the realisation of missions under the Association's mandate. This means that interventions are perceived as enablers rather than sources of change. The role that projects are expected to play in the host context led to the formalisation of the term 'technical and financial partners' (*partenaires techniques et financiers*, PTF, in French), which is a very common piece of jargon among the AIC, the MAEP, and the CRA-CF. The term is self-explanatory and signifies the place of projects within the institutional ecology of traditional aid-hosting countries, which I examine in the next chapter. As Amoussou explained to me, host actors maintain 'functional' relations with PTF, which he distinguished from the 'hierarchical' relations within their own organisation. Furthermore, the functional relationships are established through the hierarchical chain:

Here, the functional relationships come from the top. For example, you are a project and you went first at the top before coming here, they gave you authorisation and I am now obliged to work with you, so we maintain functional relationships... I have no direct order to receive from you, but from my boss who tells me 'you have to work with him'.

Amoussou also pointed out that functional relationships are temporary, but 'they all contribute to the preservation of the permanent structures, which are aware of everything we do here'. Later on, during field research, I met with an AIC staff member based in Cotonou who explained this concept to me using similar words. In addition, in demonstrating the contrasting temporalities of projects and prevailing structures, he stressed

the need for prevailing institutions to coordinate the multiple short-lived initiatives and fit them in a long-term national strategy.

4.1.5. Differences and similarities across actors' experiences in development encounters

When I first arrived in Benin to conduct field research, my main contacts came from my past experiences as project manager, especially when I worked for the Brazilian Cooperation Agency in the management of the Cotton 4+Togo project. The project worked mainly with INRAB and CRA-CF agronomists, hence they were my entry point to the cotton sector. At that time, I had a preconceived idea of their wide involvement in cotton projects because of my personal experience, but I did not imagine that they had been more involved than farmers. As I progressed with the data collection, I have to admit I felt frustrated every time I met a farmer who had not participated in any project activity or had not even heard about them. I thought that cotton projects, being so numerous, were much more present in farmers' lives. I realised then how exclusive project experiences were – some being more than others, but none being able to have a wide coverage of actors, territory, and topics at once.

In this context, CRA-CF researchers are the group of actors most well-acquainted with cotton projects. They were familiar with current and past initiatives, even if not directly involved. For example, when I asked an agronomist about a certain project, he was able to redirect me to the colleague who had worked on it. Individual involvement in projects varied according to the topic covered by the project, and the area and time of intervention, but project activities appeared to be part of their enduring context: there was always a project working with someone at the CRA-CF. This was very different from what rural extension agents, farmers, and AIC staff shared with me. For rural extension agents, projects emerged as an intermittent and irregular experience that they perceived as generally positive – except for the fact they did not last. As Gildas suggested, projects enabled him to be exposed to different methods of facilitating training and providing agricultural advice. The rules and resources that shape social relations within projects structures enabled that distinction. Similarly, due to not being as involved in projects as cotton researchers, farmers also felt the mismatch between activities carried out within and outside project frameworks, as suggested many times by George. The few farmers I met who had participated in project activities could barely mention more than two projects. In addition, they would often confuse projects and partners and could not precisely indicate when or with whom they had worked. This

indicates the marginalised place projects have in their lives and the exclusiveness of the initiatives. However, George's experiences with projects also indicate that he accessed resources and information that were not available via the official channels. Furthermore, he had been exposed, via the official channels, to agricultural techniques that only projects had introduced, indicating that project arrangements do permeate prevailing institutions somehow, as I explore in chapter 6.

Moving now to the perceptions of the group of actors who govern the sector, AIC staff and ginners maintain very functional relationships with projects – when they exist in their lives. For these groups, who occupy a dominant position in the cotton value chain, projects seem less important. Sometimes projects are there, sometimes they are not, but projects are often unimportant, with little footprint in the life trajectories of AIC and ginner staff alike. They remain welcome, but not as essential or desired as they could be for farmers, rural extension agents, and cotton researchers.

To conclude this section, projects emerged – with variation across categories of actors – as fleeting and distinctive experiences when compared to the institutional arrangements that prevail in the host context and that have, therefore, more weight in shaping practices. In the next sections of this chapter, I focus on the different arrangements of projects by describing them against the arrangements and characteristics of the prevailing institutions of the host context.

4.2. The distinct arrangements projects introduce into the host context

The inability of projects to comprehend the complexities of the host context has been suggested as the main cause for the failure of projects to bring about structural change (Andrews et al., 2017; Burns and Worsley, 2015; Green, 2016; Ramalingam, 2013). The mapping of project experiences in the life trajectories of actors within the cotton sector demonstrates that projects enable different experiences, in the sense that these experiences are extremely different from the experiences that occur under the prevailing institutional arrangements. For example, only through projects has George, the cotton farmer, had access to specific knowledge about finance management, while projects enabled Gildas to be exposed to different methods of training that he could replicate when he delivered training as a rural extension agent. Léo, the most experienced in projects amongst the above, acknowledged the gap between project and prevailing arrangements and indicated a certain

degree of dependency on project resources, which contrast sharply with those available outside project frameworks. Amoussou also noted the gap between the resources available within projects and within prevailing institutions, but the short-lived nature and specificity of projects seemed to lead to indifference, in face of the importance and durability of prevailing arrangements.

Since institutional bricolage implies that actors piece together components that they gather from different institutional settings in order to respond to everyday challenges, and assuming that development cooperation projects are one of the sources of institutional arrangements, in this section I scrutinise the development cooperation ‘piece’. I explore the characteristics of project arrangements in order to define their shape and how they fit amid other institutional arrangement in the process of bricolage.

4.2.1. Project institutional arrangements and their constituent elements

The objective of every project is to enable different practices to take place in the host context by importing currently non-existing institutional arrangements or, in other words, pieces that can be used in the process of institutional bricolage. These arrangements are formed by the combination of rules and resources that a project introduces in the context. By doing this, projects expect to create dynamics that will prove beneficial to the host actors who will be responsible, at the end of the project, for reproducing, perpetuating, and scaling up the same institutional arrangements the project introduced. However, the gap between a project and a prevailing context’s rules and resources is so important that it makes the reproduction and perpetuation of project institutional arrangements practically impossible in the same terms.

Rules of projects

Most of the cotton projects in Benin are intended to change prevailing agricultural practice in order to reach the overall and common goal of increasing income and reducing poverty. (Only a few projects, such as the French PARSC, the World Bank’s TAP, and PARFC, worked solely with budgetary and institutional support without any agricultural practice component.) Therefore, every cotton project introduces rules that contrast with prevailing ones. But the rules projects introduce in order to change practices seem to be too distant from what happens outside project frameworks.

The cotton sector is an organised sector, with a system of cooperatives, rural credit, and a formalised planting protocol, the technical itinerary (ITK).¹⁶ The ITK provides the rules for growing cotton: the planting calendar, the quantities and times of application of inputs, the time of harvesting and marketing. Cotton farming is therefore framed and regulated by the competent national authorities who elaborate, approve, and promote the ITK. Projects, by contrast, introduce rules for growing cotton that co-exist with the prevailing national scheme while being very different.

At the level of farmers, a project usually imposes a planting protocol presenting a rupture with usual practices based on the ITK. The differences can vary from the distance between plants, the obligation to rotate with specific crops, the frequency of pest treatments, the quantity and type of fertilisers, and so on. These rules are necessary conditions for a project to attain the desired objectives, according to the strategy of implementation. For example, the global objective of PADSE (1998–2005) was to enable farmers to increase their incomes by changing agricultural systems. The project's main innovation in the cotton sector was the introduction of staggered pest control (in French, *lutte étagée ciblée*, or LEC from now on), which became the project's flagship component. LEC consists of the systematic observation of cotton plants to assess the level of infestation before the application of pesticides. The adoption of the technique leads to a general reduction in the use of pesticides, since the farmer would only apply the chemical when the population of a given pest crossed the corresponding pre-established threshold. The effectiveness of LEC depends on a monitoring methodology that requires regular visits to the cotton fields. Farmers need to scout their fields diagonally and count the number of pests in a sample of plants. If the number of pests observed exceeds the threshold, the farmer proceeds with the treatment. When implemented properly, LEC has significant potential to decrease farmers' financial burden from the use of agrochemicals.¹⁷ Project reports demonstrate that the application of pesticides on demand, instead of systematically, as promoted in the ITK, reduced the cost of production considerably, while maintaining levels of production and the quality of the lint (Prudent et al., 2003).

From this perspective and within the project's structure, the project was a success: it demonstrated that LEC was a relevant technique that could have a long-term impact on

¹⁶ Refer to Appendix A.7. for details on the technical itinerary in force when this research was conducted and on the functioning of the cotton sector.

¹⁷ The AIC estimates the total production cost related to agrochemicals (including fertilisers, herbicides, and pesticides) at 40 per cent of the predicted earnings from cotton in a given farm.

farmers' income by transforming cotton farming practices. However, these rules contrasted sharply with the prevailing arrangements that shape practices in the host context. Indeed, it is common for a farmer to only visit their fields when strictly necessary. Generally, their cotton fields are scattered over a vast territory, often far from the village, sometimes in a different district. The prevailing conditions in the context, such as the discontinuous locations of cotton fields, hinders their capacity to regularly visit them, since the majority of cotton farmers lack human and financial resources to hire field observers and pay for fuel, for example. This was one of the reasons that systematic treatments, scheduled every fortnight, regardless of the presence of pests, persisted in the official technical itinerary – and even with the simplification proposed by the ITK, some farmers have to skip windows of treatment because of the lack of means of transportation.¹⁸

There is another level of change that project rules enable in the context, which are changes in meta-practices – practices that reflect on or refer to other practices (Messner et al., 2008). While the example of PADSE above demonstrated how different rules enabled the introduction of different agricultural practices, projects also create spaces in which actors are invited to act differently from usual, while doing the same kind of activity they usually do. These are changes that appear to be more abstract and less explicit than the imposition of rotation plans or planting protocols, because they refer to changes in behaviour and social interaction patterns. For example, there is a shared understanding that the agent the project hires needs to follow the norms of the project, to be accountable and serious.¹⁹ This means that when visiting a grower's plot within a project's framework, the agent needs to act differently as they would do when working for the national service, outside project frameworks: they might spend more time in the plot, take notes, and give more constructive advice to the farmer. Projects also require and enable them to increase the frequency of visits and to become responsive to growers' demands and needs. When performing everyday tasks, however, the agent acts according to the prevailing rules, power relations, constraints, and possibilities. A former extension agent explained to me this distinction in practices between project and everyday activities as follows:

I can't say I work in the same way [in a project]. The project expects a result from me right away. I give it as soon as possible, in the best way I can. When it is the state [i.e. practice within the prevailing structure], I give myself a little more time, because I know that I will not be quickly evaluated, so I give

¹⁸ CF#2, 10/11/2017; CF#3, 17/11/2017; and focus groups with farmers on 17/11/2017.

¹⁹ MAEP#4, 09/02/2018.

myself a little more largesse, that's true... I work less when I work for the state than when I work for a project... and it is not only about money, it is about knowing that there will not be any monitoring. I know that before they come here to assess my work, I will have done what I have to do. And the bureaucracy is so slow that I can allow myself time to have some fun.²⁰

Project bureaucracies appears to be more rigid and to require a higher level of engagement from actors. In turn, the distinct rules of projects seem to push agents to increase their performance. On the other hand, as suggested by Gildas, regular workshops organised by the prevailing structures lacked engagement and transparency. By these means, social interaction patterns also change, as a rural extension agent explained:

When an expert comes with a project, whether a foreigner or Beninese, they will not rush it [*bâcler le travail*] ... when he finishes, he comes to the field to check, and if you did not understand, he explains again. When it is with AIC [hence, outside project frameworks], when you do not understand, they come and they insult you in front of the farmers. Then you are frustrated and you do not want to do a good job anymore.²¹

The changes in practices and meta-practices can also be explained by the fact that projects are rare and perceived as an opportunity to make gains – an opportunity to earn extra income, in particular. The agent must perform well because future opportunities depend on it and because they know that they are being assessed accordingly. In a context of scarce resources, these opportunities are not negligible. (I explore the effects on subsequent projects of the disparity of resources within and outside project structures in chapter 5.)

At this point, it becomes clear that rules and resources intertwine to enable different practices. As suggested by Giddens (1984), it is the interplay between rules and resources that compose social structures. Thus, project rules require resources in the same way project resources require rules, because one gives purpose to and sustains the other.

The extraordinary resources of projects

In contrast to everyday activities, partners implement project activities with relatively abundant resources. The different level of resources available within project frameworks does not go unnoticed, being reflected in a set of activities that are conducted within both project and prevailing structures, such as farm work and training.

Growing cotton is an activity that is usually done with scarce resources, both human and financial. The majority of farmers live below the poverty line and receive only a thin share of

²⁰ INRAB#8, 22/05/2018.

²¹ MAEP#4, 09/02/2018.

the total income generated by the cotton industry (INSAE, 2018; Ouin-Ouro, 2018a). Hence, agriculturalists grow cotton with the means they already have at their disposal, and the level of private investment is very low (Ton, 2004). In this context, farmers make use of the workforce available in the household. This includes women and children, whose hands are particularly appreciated for harvesting, while farm management remains the business of the men of the village (Alidou and Niehof, 2013; Floquet and Mongbo, 2006). A farmer I met in the Borgou department had to reduce the surface he reserved for cotton precisely because of the lack of workforce. Further on, he acknowledged that the lack of resources was also related to technical knowledge, which hindered their ability to assess the benefits from the crop:

You see, our problem is that the farmer has no resources... it is not in terms of financial means... It is about... I don't know... means to verify the quality of the products that they give us. I told you, the state is supposed to check this, but who guarantees that they did and that this is going to be good for the farmers? Our organisations are not structured to make counter-expertise about the fertilisers, so we have to trust what is given to us. Now, the bills only increase. The date of expiry of the fertilisers we bought this year is September or even August [2017].²²

In contrast, a farmer who agrees to dedicate a piece of his land to project activities receives the corresponding quantity of agricultural inputs from the project, without fees. In addition, projects hire the workforce needed for ploughing, sowing, and harvesting. A team of experts ensures that the techniques are being implemented as planned in a kind of enhanced close supervision – while outside project frameworks a rural extension agent is expected to support 360 farmers on average, according to research participants. By these means, projects considerably reduce the costs of producing cotton within project structures, creating a sort of different reality, far from the prevailing possibilities and constraints of the host context. As a consequence, farmers get higher profits within projects, since the farmers who grow ‘project cotton’ still sell their production to the AIC at the government price. This is aligned with the purpose of projects, as explained by an extension agent in Kandi, for whom project resources support and incentivise host actors, so the project can be successful:

The particularity is that when a project comes there is support that follows. There is the support and there are the incentives at the producer level that follow. To implement the project, WACIP for example, it has been said from the beginning that the pilot producers who will be identified, they will give them free fertilizer for their demonstration field. Then they say to the extension agents who follow these producers there, ‘when you come for

²² CF#3, 17/11/2017.

training, there are per-diems paid to you', and there are fuel supplements that are given to you every month. So, at the level of the agents there are supporting measures, at the producer level there are incentive measures. That's how we work with these different projects.²³

Along the same lines, other project participants have pointed out the availability of resources as one of the main distinctions between a project's activities and prevailing activities. When projects organise training, local trainers and participants receive more incentives to attend the activity: the trainers receive extra payments and participants a daily subsistence allowance that is considerably higher than in training within the prevailing structures. This has a direct impact on the way they deliver such training. An AIC extension agent working in Banikoara explained to me how he perceives this difference:

The difference between the workshops? You need to know the donors' world. There is support and motivation [with projects]. The growers engage more [because of] the availability of tools, which make the people motivated... However, when the INRAB organises, there is low motivation... the only ones to come are the ones who are volunteering, who want to adopt, who are interested. It is harder to implement because there is a lack of motivation.

Me: What kind of motivation?

I am talking about working tools. For example, when they organise a workshop on pit compost, they provide wheelbarrows, shovels, and boots to the workshop, to make [the pit]. On the other side [within the prevailing arrangements], we only tell the people, *voilà* how you do it, and the activity ends there. It is the sad reality, but it is the reality.²⁴

In this sense, project resources enable the creation of differentiated practices that are often better assessed by host actors when compared with similar activities organised within prevailing structures. In a focus group discussion, CRA-CF researchers linked to extraordinary project resources the speed of procedures within project arrangements that they observed and wished they had in their day-to-day work:

In most of the projects that I have known, to reach the goals we go three times faster than when it is in the ordinary administration. At CRA-CF, we first have to have the signature of the chief, of the chief of the chief, and of the chief of the chief of the chief... and finally after a year, pfff, what must be done is not done. While in a project, generally, what I have found, when the decision is made, since the means are available, very often there is no blocking, very quickly you have your motorcycles, even if it is a tractor, very quickly you have it.²⁵

²³ MAEP#5, 07/04/2018.

²⁴ AIC#4, 21/11/2017.

²⁵ Focus group with CRA-CF agronomists on 09/04/2018

In addition to improving the speed and quality of activities, project resources also increase their frequency. In some structures, training and other capacity-building activities only exist under project frameworks, because of the lack of resources that predominates. Such is the case for cotton research; there is no internal training strategy in the CRA-CF and the only opportunities for training and re-training (*recyclage* in French) are through project support:

Outside project frameworks... I can say there is no training... at least not for the position I held. But for the agents who are in the field, there was training to show them how to implement the tests and to re-train them... It's only the projects that come and who can organise this training.²⁶

By these means, the budget disparity has created a sort of dependency on project support in regards to realising certain day-to-day activities. In particular, this affects cotton research, which has been the main beneficiary of development projects in the cotton sector since the 1960s. In the period 2000 to 2011, the average annual budget for cotton research was 477,000 USD dollars (Allagbé and Stads, 2014), which is marginal compared to the means a development project brings to the cotton sector. For example, in 2009 the cotton sector in Benin was hosting eight different projects and one of them alone, PROCOTON (2006–2013), had a budget of one million dollars per year. In this regard, project resources provide opportunities for knowledge development, innovation, and dissemination of good practice from research to farmers. A 'project is an investment *avant tout*'²⁷ and an investment that it is difficult for host actors to access via prevailing institutions.

Not surprisingly, the injection of human, material, and financial resources enabled the appearance of different practices in the cotton sector. Projects introduced practices related to conservation agriculture, integrated pest management, the empowerment of women, cooperative management, and so on. In this sense, the extraordinary resources of projects, inseparably from their rules, played in favour of sector development by expanding the repertoire of practices and meta-practices available in the host context.

However, the gap between the arrangements available within and outside projects caught my attention. I wondered how such different practices, leading to the desired change projects envisioned, could continue beyond the limited time frame of interventions or even scale up to include more beneficiaries without project resources. These constitute the flip side of projects, a factor which works against them, which is their exclusive and short-lived nature.

²⁶ INRAB#2, 13/11/2017.

²⁷ INRAB#2, 13/11/2017.

4.2.2. The exclusive and short-lived nature of project components

Exclusivity and a limited time frame are innate characteristics of projects. As pointed out by Gildas, working with projects is better because they bring the conditions to make work easier, but the problem of projects is that they are not meant to last indefinitely nor to benefit everyone or every region. Thus, project arrangements are restricted in time and exclusive to the ‘target’ regions and beneficiaries. This limitation in time and space makes the development cooperation institution temporary and specific.

Project physical boundaries: Limited space and scope

In the Beninese cotton sector, most projects share the same global objective of reducing poverty by increasing the income of farmers. This objective was formulated from a common diagnosis that has persisted throughout the years and across most projects: the predominance of poverty in rural areas among cotton farmers combined with institutional weakness. This diagnosis led to two large domains of intervention. The first aims to change prevailing agricultural practices to increase yields and thereby farmers’ incomes. The second targets institutional strengthening through budget and material support. These two broad areas of intervention often overlap, according to the understanding of the partner on these issues. For instance, Brazil’s approach sought to strengthen institutions through building the capacities of researchers, extension agents, and farmers in regards to better agricultural practices.

The first domain of intervention has consisted mainly of sharing innovative agricultural techniques. These could focus on soil fertility, phytosanitary treatments, mechanisation, etc. The improvement of soil fertility has been the main domain of project intervention since the 2000s. Projects have attempted to transform traditional practices through the diffusion of techniques that combine chemical with organic fertilisers, by suggesting crop rotation, direct seeding under mulch, and so on. On phytosanitary treatments, several projects, since the 1990s, have been sharing integrated pest management techniques, such as LEC and the use of neem oil as a natural pesticide. Mechanisation has also been introduced via projects and has been at the heart of recent projects implemented by France, China, and India.

The support for institutional strengthening can be sorted into projects that provide financial and material support to national institutions and projects that aim to develop knowledge through institutional support, especially those addressed to agricultural research. Financial and material support predominated in the early years of development projects in the cotton sector and has become an expectation in subsequent projects (as I explore in chapter 5). The

World Bank projects of the 1980s and 1990s, and more recently PROCOTON (2006–2013) and PAFICOT (2007–2013), had their main focus on institutional support through the provision of material and financial resources and the delivery of specialised training on organisational management.

Although these domains of intervention are important to the development of the cotton sector, they do not address all the causes of poverty among cotton growers. Farmers' main concern remains the high cost of the factors of production and the low purchase prices of seed cotton. The prices of inputs and of purchase remain structural problems and challenges that projects do not address.

In addition to being limited in scope, projects also need to restrain their geographical and populational reach. There is a strong bias in the preparation of an activity, which is that projects select participants whose profiles allow the project to achieve its objective – as Amselle (1988) suggested by demonstrating that projects that were successful were so because they worked with well-off farmers first. A rural extension agent explained to me the participant selection process, which does not necessarily reflect the configuration of the host context, but rather the project's own framework:

Well, [the projects] choose... it depends on the criteria they have defined. If, for example, the project aims to have worked with 45% of women at the end of the project, then, you see, the project says: 'ah, when you choose six men, there should be four women, in the village'. So the project comes with their criteria. Or the project tells you: 'the farmers you choose should be farmers who own oxen, because the technology I want to implement... the organic manure, is mainly cow dung or crop residues, so the producers who have oxen, I can take them, because I know that in terms of availability of cow dung, the problem will not arise'. The project can also say that it is going to work with farmers who have a slightly improved yield... at 1,200 kilogram per hectare, so it is going to take farmers in that category. So, it depends on the criteria of the objective we are aiming for. This is how it works.²⁸

Besides selecting farmers that fit with the project objectives, projects also need to limit the spaces of intervention, which makes them exclusive. Activity in recent project illustrates well the magnitude of the gap between project beneficiaries and the overall number of farmers. In October 2016, the C4+Togo (2014–2019) organised a capacity building activity addressed to cotton growers, the objective of which was to train the farmers on no-till seeding and on sustainable soil management. Seventy farmers attended the workshop, which is a relatively large number for a training activity that included theoretical and practical work in the

²⁸ MAEP#5, 07/04/2018.

demonstration field. The participants came from nineteen districts located in seven departments. By these means, the project sought to cover the main cotton producing areas, since the majority of participants came from the northern departments. Yet the number of participants was insignificant when put into the perspective of the cotton industry. In Banikoara, for example, 21,525 farmers grew cotton in 2018, and four of them attended that workshop. From the Alibori department, the biggest cotton producing region, sixteen growers out of 57,423 participated. Even if all sixteen participants adopted the innovative techniques of soil management back in their plots, this change would be a modest contribution to the project's overall objective of improving Beninese cotton competitiveness in the international market. Eventually, their practice could inspire their neighbours or members of the cooperative, and in a few years a larger number of farmers in Alibori would see the soil becoming more fertile. But that is a bet that does not fit in project documents, time frame, or resources. Through the selection of participants and regions of intervention, project activities become an exclusive experience reserved for a few.

The spatial boundaries of projects can also become visible in the field. Brazil's C4+Togo project (2014–2019) disseminated no-till farming with cover crops in the cotton farming system. CRA-CF staff started testing the technique during the implementation of the first Brazilian project, from 2009 to 2013. The second phase of the project created on-farm experimentation fields to try out Brazilian techniques and to take them closer to the reality of farmers. These demonstration plots were located in volunteer farmers' fields, who agreed to dedicate a piece of land to the project, in which cotton farming would be shaped by the project's arrangements. In the project plan, one third of the plot was reserved for cotton, while the other two thirds were split between food crops (such as maize and beans) associated with cover plants, and an area is left fallow. The cotton plot was also split in two. In one part, the project applied conventional methods, while next to it, project techniques were adopted to demonstrate the contrast. Figure 10 shows the model of this planting protocol and its materialisation in the field.

Figure 10: The C4+Togo demonstration plot model as presented at the WTO in 2019 (left) and the plot in Parakou a few weeks before harvest in 2017 (right)



The rotation and combination with other crops were necessary conditions of project success but contrasted excessively with prevailing schemes. For instance, cotton growers allot, on average, one third of their fields for cotton (Weiss, 2013, and interviewed participants), which corresponds to the rules established by the C4+Togo planting protocol, but it is not common to leave any piece of land fallow for an entire season. Letting the land rest was an essential variable in regards to getting the expected results. Similarly, the use of cover plants is a fundamental aspect, but very unusual in Beninese cotton farming. The idea of growing plants that are neither food nor cash crops is alien in the host context.

In addition, the imported technique would only work in Benin if the fields were secured, to prevent herds of pastoralists passing through and eating the cover plants. Hence, the project installed a two-meter-tall metal fence to protect the demonstration plots from cattle. It is unusual to see such equipment in the Beninese rural landscape. Farmers do not secure their plots because they do not have the means to do so; even barbed-wire fences are out of reach for farmers.²⁹ In addition, the fragmentation of their fields increases the costs of implementation and of opportunity. Yet project staff and researchers hoped that the good results, when they became visible, would be enough incentive to convince the farmers to invest in securing their plots.

²⁹ CF#12, 22/11/2017; INRAB#1, 13/10/2017; INRAB#6, 12/07/2018; MAEP#3, 07/02/2018; focus group with cotton farmers on 17/11/2017.

Figure 11: Cotton within and outside project spaces: a fenced plot in Toura marking the project boundary and the exclusive access to a project's resources



The fence, as shown in figure 11 above, was a prerequisite for the project to attain its objectives within this context and it delimited the physical space of project arrangements and practices. Within the fence, abundant resources and differentiated rules enabled distinct practices that project implementers expected to see replicated beyond the fence. However, besides creating exclusive spaces, project experiments are also limited in time, meaning that the conditions allowing for these experiments, the fence and the results, are short-lived.

Temporal project boundaries: Irreconcilable temporalities of change

In addition to being restricted in scope and space, projects arrangements do not last – and are not meant to. The expectation is that the positive changes happening within projects boundaries will continue and will scale up in the host context. However, different perspectives from the host context see projects as considerably short-lived experiences that contrast with the long-term pace of change.

The projects that development partners have implemented in the cotton sector in Benin from 1963 to 2018 have, on average, a duration of 4.5 years. This period starts with the official launch of the project and the signing of the cooperation agreement. However, the period of actual implementation of a five-year project is rarely five years. On one hand, managers start implementing activities a few months (or years) after the actual starting date. On the other hand, it is common to see partners extending the implementation period for a

few months or implementing a follow-up project. Host actors are blunt about the inability of projects to contribute to structural changes:

It should be noted that it is hard for a four, or even five-year project be able to bring something that could really impact the cotton sector – since it's an annual crop, we only grow it once a year, so everything we bring to it is evaluated from year to year.³⁰

Indeed, when it comes to agricultural projects, seasonality is an important factor that drives the realisation of activities. The cotton campaign in Benin starts in May every year. According to the technical itinerary, farmers can start seeding from the end of May until the end of July – the dates vary in the different departments and should follow the first rains as a rule of thumb. The harvest happens from October to January, when the sector enters its 'commercialisation' phase with collection, purchase, and processing of seed cotton. Project activities must fit in this calendar. When organising training, for example, there must be plants in the field, lest there be no results to show.

Despite the acknowledgment of seasonality, projects propose a temporality of change that does not fit with the temporality of the context. Project time frames are submitted to exogenous rules: those of donors and providers. In this context, in the second half of 2017, CRA-CF researchers were expecting to host a new project, TAZCO (2018–2021). The signing of the agreement was delayed between Cotonou and Paris, and instead of happening in July 2017, Benin and France officially launched the project in January 2018. In order not to miss an agricultural year, staff from the French Development Agency (AFD), the implementing agency, rushed to Parakou in August 2017 to seed their experimentation plot – hence later than the advised planting period. When I visited the plot in October 2017, the CRA-CF staff could not say which technology the project would share, because they had not been involved in the design process. '[The project] is for a transition to agro-ecology... They came here two months ago and planted all this that you see here... but we don't know the [planting] protocol. They came with the protocol ready and did this.'³¹ To ensure the project's success, it was crucial to plant before the end of the sowing season. In the first year, the project needed to grow both cotton and the cover crops that would be used in the next season. Had they missed the planting season, the effects of planting on mulch on the fertility of the soil would only be perceived from the third year and the impact on cotton yields only from the fourth year onwards. But TAZCO is a three-year project only. The project's period

³⁰ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

³¹ INRAB#1, 19/10/2017.

of implementation does not fit with the temporality of observable changes in agricultural practices.

These contrasting temporalities of change undermine project processes and methods of implementation. One year later, I visited TAZCO's plot again. The CRA-CF had appointed an agronomist to work as a focal point and to manage the experiments. The designated staff, however, did not stay long and at the time of my visit the TAZCO project did not have a focal point in Parakou anymore. The lack of local supervision was visible on that day in July 2018, when some women, hired by the project, were sowing maize under the supervision of a CRA-CF agent. Like Brazil's C4+Togo, TAZCO aims to disseminate the use of cover crops and direct seeding on mulch, the same techniques that the CRA-CF was testing a few meters away within the C4+Togo fenced plot. Nevertheless, the plots do not look alike. Surprisingly, the agronomist who conducted the visit did not know much about what was going on and why the soil in the TAZCO plot was so dry. According to him, the cover plants were not being disposed correctly on the soil. He explained to the TAZCO agent how they should be doing it, but the latter just nodded reluctantly and did not seem too engaged or determined to work differently. 'You should have a look at our side', the agronomist said between ironic laughs while leaving the TAZCO plot.

The TAZCO experience demonstrates that the short-lived feature of projects changes the pace of implementation, subsequently affecting project results. Although CRA-CF researchers appreciated the speed in accessing project resources, the imposition of limited time frames is a concern which make them question what happens after the project:

The problem of temporality is for me very important and the flow of resources that comes with the projects often forces the coordinator, or the actors of a project, to finish in the time allocated to them and to show [the results] quickly... even though they have a line of sustainability, which is difficult to fill at the end of the project.³²

The time constraints of projects do not match the need for agricultural research to develop, experiment, and disseminate. The adoption and dissemination by the CRA-CF of new varieties and techniques require at least two years of trials in their experimentation fields, plus a season of pre-dissemination in farm trials with selected farmers. By contrast, some projects 'skip that procedure and go straight to work with farmers to share their own technologies',³³ neglecting the fact that changes in the official ITK need to be first suggested

³² INRAB#8, 09/04/2018.

³³ INRAB#2, 13/11/2017.

by the CRA-CF. For a project manager, ‘the people are in a rush... it should not be like that... we need to try the techniques first, but there is a restlessness in project implementation’.³⁴

Thus, the different temporalities are perceived as an obstacle for a project alone to transform the prevailing structures. From this perspective, projects are often seen as failures by host actors, because

even when it works and it takes root... when the project disappears, that is the time we let go what we were doing. Only a few continue with the innovation that the partners wanted us to do.³⁵

Because projects are limited in time and space within the host context, they end up creating islands of prosperity, with few or weak connections to prevailing arrangements. While the institutional arrangements that projects introduce enable good practices within the context, these dynamics remain too specific and bounded by the time frames of project implementation. In other words, the pieces that projects introduce into the context to be part of actors’ repertoire appear, at first and within their own physical and temporal boundaries, to have shapes that do not fit alongside the other pieces available in the host context.

Conclusion

Cotton projects have been a constant in the Beninese cotton sector since the 1960s. They have shaped the lives of actors to different degrees, appearing and disappearing in people’s life trajectories with varying levels of intensity. The mapping of project footprints in life trajectories demonstrates that projects have introduced distinct experiences when compared to the activities that are organised by and framed within the prevailing structures. This occurs because every project introduces into the local context the necessary tailor-made arrangements to enable the achievement of its desired objectives. The resulting experiences of projects, apparently positive according to different perspectives from the field, nevertheless have limits: they are short-lived and exclusive, hindering each project’s ability to become part of the prevailing context in the terms expected in project documents. In this sense, the examination of project institutional arrangements, or pieces of bricolage, demonstrates that a project is more designed as reflection of itself than based on the

³⁴ IDP#7, 17/04/2018.

³⁵ MAEP#4, 09/04/2018.

characteristics and idiosyncrasies of the context. Indeed, the mismatch is such that it makes one wonder whether projects are designed to self-accomplish, within their own boundaries, or to trigger similar dynamics in the prevailing context, beyond project periods of implementation and direct beneficiaries.

In spite of being a very different piece in the institutional bricolage process, project experiences remain a source of components from which actors can draw when reacting to everyday challenges. For instance, Léo and other agronomists who are more acquainted with projects draw upon past project experiences when they engage in subsequent ones, and Gildas demonstrated that he reproduces meta-practices when delivering training within the prevailing institutions. In the next chapters, I examine the project piece from a historical trajectory to understand changes in the arrangements that projects have introduced into the cotton sector (chapter 5), and the traces projects have left in prevailing arrangements throughout history stemming from the long-term interplay between projects and the host context (chapter 6). By doing so, I move from analysis of what a project is to how it came to be.

CHAPTER 5. HISTORY IN THE MAKING: THE PRODUCTION, REPRODUCTION, AND CHANGE OF COTTON PROJECTS

In chapter 4, the life trajectories of host actors revealed that projects are too short and too specific when compared to the enduring dynamics of the context. Additionally, the rules and resources that projects introduce are too different from the prevailing social structures of the sector in which they intervene. However, these kinds of experiences, admitting their particularities, have been being produced and reproduced in the cotton sector for at least 55 years, with ruptures and continuities. On one hand, projects, donors, and project teams change constantly, each one providing a singular experience. On the other hand, some host actors participate in various projects in their life trajectories, carrying elements from one project to another. Such recurring experiences leave footprints that can be observed within subsequent projects, thus making this the path from ad hoc to durable as enduring institutions.

In this chapter, I focus on the trajectory of cotton projects in order to identify the construction and consolidation of a pattern of aid and development cooperation. In such a continuous flow of development encounters, earlier experiences have a distinct weight. They set the ground for subsequent projects, shaping the way actors engage with them and, in this way, transforming project processes. Therefore, in the trajectory of projects, I pay particular attention to continuities and ruptures. The aid paradigm has changed considerably from the first to the last batch of cotton projects, but some principles and practices have endured. In this sense, the arrival of Southern cotton projects in a traditional aid-hosting context sheds light on the possibilities and difficulties of transforming development practice.

In the first section, I describe the main characteristics of the first cotton projects and how later projects consolidated certain elements that construed a tradition of aid. In the second section, the study of Southern cotton projects illuminates the weight of earlier experiences and the challenges of transforming regularised practices.

5.1. The birth and consolidation of traditional cotton aid

As the concept of institutional bricolage suggests, based on Bourdieu's theory of practice, early experiences have particular weight in shaping human action and, therefore, subsequent experiences. In this section, I first focus on earlier projects, then on the continuation of traditional patterns in subsequent ones.

5.1.1. The constitution of aid traditions

In this sub-section, I describe how the first cotton projects pursued colonial plans of intensification of cotton production and produced a pattern of aid. Then I focus on an example from cotton research to illustrate the creation of a pattern against which subsequent initiatives are assessed.

Colonial continuities

The Republic of Dahomey signed with France the first international development project on cotton in 1963, three years after independence. The objective of the Cotton Development project (1963–1969) was simple: to multiply by four the production of cotton in Dahomey. In that period, there were no concerns in the project narrative about alleviating poverty or increasing the autonomy of farmers, as we could see in the following decades. In fact, the project provided a legal framework that enabled French companies to continue extracting resources from the former colony after independence and to reduce their dependence on US cotton (Levrat, 2009). Since the eighteenth century, the expansion of cotton production around the world has been promoted by the interests of industrialists in the Global North, who aimed to develop pools of production of raw cotton to provide the quantities and the quality they needed at the lowest cost possible (Beckert, 2015). The development of the cotton sector in Dahomey was no different.

In this sense, the French Company for Textile Development (CFDT), created in 1949, continued to operate in Dahomey, being the only investor, promoter, processor, and exporter of cotton. An older cotton farmer shared with me the receipt (figure 12) he received from the CFDT for his first sale of seed cotton in 1971. In that year, he grew cotton in a plot within his father's field. More than 10 years after independence, the French were still in charge of the cotton sector, including purchasing and commercialisation, but also research and rural extension.

Figure 12: Ten years after independence, Beninese farmers still sold cotton to the CFDT (receipts from 1970, 1971, and 1974)

The image displays three receipts from the Compagnie Française pour le Développement des Fibres Textiles (CFDT). Each receipt is a form with handwritten entries in blue ink. The receipts are dated 1970, 1971, and 1974, respectively. They all list the same buyer, 'A. Ghali', and the same village, 'Toura'. The seller's name varies: 'Mama Kpandé' in 1970, 'Tanko' in 1971, and 'Mabamé' in 1974. The receipts specify the type of cotton as 'COTON Allen' and '1er choix Mono'. The weight ('Poids') and the amount paid ('Somme payée') are also recorded. The 1970 receipt shows a weight of 3.13 and a payment of 8.138. The 1971 receipt shows a weight of 100 and a payment of 2600. The 1974 receipt shows a weight of 23.15 and a payment of 60.190. Each receipt is signed by the buyer and dated. A note at the bottom of each receipt says '(Biffer le mot inutile)'.

Date	Receipt No.	Acheteur	Carte No.	Village	Vendeur	COTON	1 ^{er} choix	Poids	Somme payée
1970	052821	A. Ghali		Toura	Mama Kpandé	Allen	Mono	3.13	8.138
1971	188848	A. Ghali		Toura	Tanko	Allen	Mono	100	2600
1974	188729	A. Ghali		Toura	Mabamé	Allen	Mono	23.15	60.190

From the interviewee's perspective, the purpose of the cotton industry in Benin was very clear then and now: to provide a commodity to the 'white people':

[In the 1970s], the white people came to buy cotton. It was the French Company. The French came to buy, and they even had their own buyers, and their own extension agents... now, we see that it is still the white people who buy it. Because [our production] does not stay here... Now, the Beninese are only organisers. But the cotton, in reality, it goes out there. You see?³⁶

In 1972, France became a guarantor and co-donor of the second cotton-specific project in Dahomey to pursue the objective of increasing cotton production, with the French Cotton Development Project (IDA, 1972). In this period, the development of the cotton sector was entirely dependent on foreign financial and human resources channelled to the host context via development projects. Indeed, project activities were carried out by staff from the CFDT and SATEC, and project funds paid for extension services, marketing, and collection, and for the construction of ginning plants. Thus, the progress towards intensification was hindered when Kérékou took control of the sector in 1973, dismissing foreign staff and causing the suspension of project disbursements (as we have seen in chapter 3). Without

³⁶ CF#6, 07/02/2018.

projects, there were no more resources to support the development of the cotton sector, and production fell.

However, the Beninese economy – and Kérékou's regime – in the 1970s remained dependent on foreign resources (Anignikin, 2010; d'Almeida-Topor, 2002; Sotindjo, 2008). By the end of that decade, the government started negotiating a series of World Bank rural development projects (Zou, Borgou I, and Borgou II) that introduced the required resources to reorganise the sector, build ginning plants, fund rural extension services, promote the use of agrochemicals, and ensure the functioning of the input credit system. The French continued to support the cotton sector, but prioritised agricultural research development instead (I describe French support for agricultural research in the next section).

The first decades of international support for the development of the cotton sector in Benin had some similar characteristics. First, they involved the inflow of financial resources that were not available in the host context, but which were necessary for pursuing the plan of increasing and intensifying cotton production. The sharp contrast of financial availability between activities within and outside project frameworks created patterns of dependency vis-à-vis foreign support. Indeed, by the end of the 1980s, in spite of the transfer of responsibility, national institutions were only able to function by means of projects. The Zou (1982–1992), Borgou I (1981–1988), and Borgou II (1988–1993) projects were essential to ensuring the functioning and operationalisation of ginneries, extension services, and marketing. For example, around 40 per cent of the CARDERs' budget was from foreign donors (World Bank, 1991). As an illustration of such dependence, the CARDERs enjoyed considerable operational and planning capacity when compared with the central services provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, precisely because the World Bank projects used the centres to implement their international development projects (World Bank, 1991).

Second, the activities implemented under these projects' frameworks all took place in the host context. The objectives were to build institutions and make them run effectively. It was not yet about developing skills and competitiveness, but to make the sector profitable. Foreign experts were based in research centres and others would travel the country to disseminate agricultural techniques. In this sense, the initiatives took a one-directional aspect, being characterised by the transfer of knowledge and resources rather than knowledge development, exchange, and institutional cooperation. As I show in the next sections, later projects challenged this pattern.

These early experiences created a baseline against which subsequent initiatives would be assessed. In the next sub-section, I focus on agricultural research, which was the area that received most of cotton projects and continued in 2018 to be the main institutional focal point of foreign initiatives.

The case of cotton agricultural research

Agricultural research in Benin was deeply shaped by France, before and after independence. In 1946, France created the Research Institute of Cotton and Exotic Textiles (IRCT) to support the development of cotton production in the colonies alongside the CFDT, which focussed on the production and commercialisation of cotton (Levrat, 2008). In 1984, France merged the nine tropical agricultural research institutes, including the IRCT, into one single structure: the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD) (CIRAD, 2019). Since the 1950s, the IRCT – until 1984 – and CIRAD have provided continuous support to Beninese agricultural research institutions.

Until 1977, IRCT stations were the only agricultural research institutes in Benin (World Bank, 1977). In February of that year, the Beninese government created a national agency in the Ministry of Rural Development and Cooperative Action (MDRAC) to support all research activities in Benin, with continued support from the French (World Bank, 1977). In 1981, agricultural research was transferred to the Ministry of Higher and Technical Education and comprised multiple research stations that specialised in different crops, including cotton (World Bank, 1981). In 1984, the Agricultural Research Directorate, again under the MDRAC and with French support, became responsible for organising cotton research and development. In 1991, the agricultural research units were still dependent on external funding, which covered about 31% of Benin's budget for crop research (World Bank, 1991).

In 1992, within the context of democratisation and liberalisation under Structural Adjustment Plans, the government of Benin created the National Agricultural Research Institute of Benin (INRAB). The INRAB was organised in stations that were specialised either in a region or in a crop, such as the Agricultural Regional Centre on Cotton (which would become later the Agricultural Research Centre on Cotton and Fibres, CRA-CF) in Parakou. Throughout the 2000s, the INRAB's budget remained dependent on external donors. Foreign contribution, especially through projects, represented more than 60% of the overall budget from 2002 to 2008 (Allagbé and Stads, 2014). Projects continued to provide the necessary resources for the functioning of cotton organisations.

Throughout these years, agricultural research presented a common diagnostic that justified foreign support: insufficient funds to operate and, consequently, dependence on foreign donors. France was still the main donor and partner. Hence, French organisational culture has shaped the organisation of agricultural research in Benin. For example, the IRCT divided their work into three divisions: agronomy, entomology, and phytosanitary, which is the same organisational structure that the INRAB and the CRA-CF present today.

The footprint of French involvement went beyond organisational culture, however. The French built most of the facilities, such as research labs, stations, and headquarters. During the interviews that took place in the INRAB's facilities, it sometimes felt that it was problematic to question French support. The French were the main promoters of cotton and agricultural research in Benin and, by those means, they became the institutional reference point. That was my feeling when a CRA-CF researcher talked about the French while answering a broad question on the origins of cotton in Benin:

It came from the French colony... French settlers, they were the ones who really developed cotton and at one point they built research centres... the first research centres were built by the colonisers. Even the building where we are now... [he looks around], they were the ones who did it.³⁷

The footprint of French support also took an abstract form, being also observed in the life trajectories of CRA-CF researchers. Many researchers have been involved in partnerships with CIRAD, including academic exchanges in France, and scholarships to pursue postgraduate degrees in French universities. The cooperation with the French became the benchmark for any other international partnership, to the point that it was not necessarily relevant to distinguish their initiatives, because they are 'old partners, working there since [their] ancestors'³⁸ and 'the CRA-CF is their home',³⁹ after all.

French support for the CRA-CF had some consistency throughout the years. PARAB (1996–2000) and its sequel PARCOB (2001–2006) focussed on plant breeding and were very well assessed by CRA-CF researchers. During the implementation phase, France placed CIRAD researchers in Benin to work daily with Beninese agronomists. The proximity created a permanent space for sharing knowledge, both scientific and organisational. In addition, despite not being a cotton producing country, French experts have longstanding experience in tropical agriculture. Therefore, Beninese researchers did not perceive the differences of

³⁷ INRAB#1, 19/10/2017.

³⁸ INRAB#2, 13/11/2017.

³⁹ 'Ici c'est chez eux.' INRAB#3, 13/11/2017.

ecosystems in France and Benin as a problem. French experts are respected, and Beninese researchers acknowledge and legitimise their work.

There are French specialists who are in institutions, in international organisations and who work in the inter-tropical zone, that is to say in West Africa for example, or in Central Africa... So, they have researchers from CIRAD who have been working in our areas here for years, who have plenty of experience in our region...

They are the connoisseurs of the field - at least that's how we consider them, so all they say is like gospel... it was like that. From the scientific point of view, technically speaking, they brought us a lot... it's a pleasure to acquire this knowledge since we know that it will serve us later, even if they go away.⁴⁰

Although the French projects were on a smaller scale than the World Bank projects, their support contributed to perpetuating the patterns that early projects introduced. Indeed, these projects consolidated the idea of a project being the source of core resources, indispensable for the normal functioning of institutions, and locally managed. Alongside the provision of resources, projects set up a management system. This system became the model that, on one hand, Beninese researchers seek to imitate in managing the national budget, and on the other hand, that they expect to find when a subsequent project is launched. In this regard, when commenting on the French way of managing projects, a CRA-CF researcher stated: 'the French are not very different from us. The means comes first... The French system is good, when we have the availability of funds and materials before the start of the activity, because we can ask for reports afterwards.'⁴¹

Similar to the cotton projects of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, French support for cotton research created a pattern of development cooperation. This pattern was defined by the provision of the human and financial resources necessary to the functioning of agricultural research. This example also shows that models of management and certain types of activities also became the norm. Later projects can be assessed against this baseline.

5.1.2. Continued tradition in subsequent projects

From the 2000s on, there was a considerable increase in the number of projects and partners intervening in the cotton sector in Benin. The diversity of donors, in particular, provided an opportunity to transform the method of implementation and the nature of projects. However, projects reproduced the patterns of previous initiatives. In parallel, the consistency

⁴⁰ INRAB#2, 13/11/2017.

⁴¹ INRAB#6, 31/01/2018.

of managerial models through time enabled host actors to develop strategies to engage in project activities.

New projects, traditional mechanisms

During the 2000s, the number of partners and projects escalated. Until 2006, the cotton sector in Benin had known only France, the World Bank, and the Netherlands as providers of development cooperation. By 2009, in addition to the previous partners, GIZ, USAID, SNV, Brazil, FAO, Helvetas, and the African Development Bank had introduced new projects to the cotton sector. The International Fertilizer Development Centre (IFDC) also became an important player by taking part in projects with different providers, such as the United States, via USAID, and the Embassy of the Netherlands in Benin.

While France and CIRAD continued to support agricultural research through PARCOB (2001–2006), France and the World Bank also started to provide support to the AIC, which had been created a few years earlier in 1999. At that time, the production of cotton in Benin had been growing vigorously for almost ten years. The increase stemmed mainly from the expansion of fields cultivated with cotton, while yields remained constant, which reduced the effect of the production boom on rural income. The World Bank's Support to Cotton Reform Project (PARFC, 2003–2008) appraisal document states that

the extent of poverty in the faster growing cotton sector is also a testimony to the fact that mere expansion in agricultural output is not a sufficient condition for poverty reduction, which requires higher productivity and employment of resources that poor people depend on for their livelihood. (World Bank, 2001, p.2)

From this diagnostic, the Bank provided a credit of 18 million USD to 'provide the necessary support to private sector operators and their institutions to fill the void left by the privatisation of the SONAPRA's ginning activities' (World Bank, 2001, p.4). The AIC was the implementation institution and the main beneficiary of funds that aimed to cover technical advisory services, training, and acquisition of vehicles, equipment, furniture, and other materials – as illustrated in figure 13. Another share would enable the Association to implement technical services programmes through rural extension activities, apart from the CARDERS' regular services. Around a quarter of the total budget was allocated to the strengthening of the farmer's federation, FUPRO, which represented the cotton growers at the AIC, while smaller shares were allocated to the improvement of ginning operations and to the management of the input credit system (World Bank, 2001).

Figure 13: The World Bank PARFC project provided necessary equipment to the cooperatives. In this picture, two 4x4 vehicles with the project's insignia await maintenance in the headquarters of the departmental union of cooperatives of cotton farmers of Borgou



Alongside the PARFC, France launched the Support for the Cotton Sector Reform project (PARSC, 2004–2009). The project intended to support the AIC through two components. The largest part of the budget was allocated to the realisation of technical studies on cotton sector development (Saizonou, 2015; Ton, 2004). A smaller share enabled the AIC to set up a communication team. A former AIC staff member declared that only a few studies have been carried out, largely because of the difficulties of getting AFD staff to approve the hiring of external consultants, for reasons that were never clear to him.⁴² At the end of the implementation period, the remaining budget was reallocated to the communication section, allowing the staff to be hired for two more years until the end of 2009.

Although the World Bank and the AFD used different funding mechanisms (credit for the former, grants for the latter), both projects consisted of direct financial support that enabled the AIC to function. This scheme reproduced the kind of support found in earlier projects, when foreign support also provided the essential means for the institutions to function. This pattern has endured with slight changes with the arrival of new partners.

In the post-2004 period, marked by a new push for cotton projects following the WTO discussions, the main initiatives were COMPACI (2006–2010), PROCOTON (2006–2013), and WACIP (2006–2013). These three projects aimed to develop the cotton sector either by creating parallel chains of production – as is the case for the COMPACI – or by enabling the functioning of existing institutions through financial and technical support. WACIP and

⁴² AIC#8, 18/04/2018.

PROCOTON, especially, aimed to support – but in fact to enable – processes that already existed or were supposed to exist in order for the sector to function.

The West Africa Cotton Improvement Programme (WACIP) was a USAID regional project implemented in the C-4 countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mali). The objective was to strengthen the capacity of farmers' organisations to reduce poverty by improving agricultural practices and natural resource management. The project also provided support to the ginneries, but the emphasis was on cotton production. The main activities built on the existing rural extension institutions to disseminate conservation agricultural practices by increasing the number of workshops and follow-up activities with selected beneficiaries. Such activities represented around 60% of the project's budget allocation in Benin (Development and Training Services, 2010, p.16). The project worked with the CRA-CF, the AIC, and the MAEP in the dissemination of an alternative technical itinerary in which organic and chemical fertilisers were combined.⁴³ According to the project evaluation, the initiative 'used more local than US expertise' even though US experts contributed to the development and review of training materials and delivered some activities in the field (Development and Training Services, 2010, p.14). The local expertise was mobilised through the hiring of former government staff in hosting countries as project managers and focal points.

The Cotton Producers Organisations Strengthening Programme (PROCOTON) was funded and implemented by the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV). The objective was to support the village cooperatives by providing material resources and by organising training on the effective management of organisations (Wennink et al., 2013). The logic of intervention was based on diagnostic studies which found that cooperatives presented serious managerial failures that compromised the earnings from cotton production. Therefore, the financial resources that the project introduced aimed to provide the financial, human, technical, and material resources that the cooperatives needed to realise their mission.

⁴³ IDP#2, 16/02/2018.

Figure 14: Chairs PROCOTON provided to the cotton farmers' cooperative of Borgou



These projects left a mark in the local context. Cooperatives' representatives and extension agents also remembered the 'good times' of PROCOTON, when the headquarters were equipped (by providing chairs to cooperatives, as figure 14 illustrates), and the staff had opportunities to be trained.⁴⁴ In this sense, the project continued to provide that necessary support without which the organisations could not fulfil their role.

Even though WACIP and PROCOTON set up project teams in Benin to manage the funds, they continued to provide the means for national institutions to function. PROCOTON did not resist the sectoral reforms though. In 2009, farmers' organisations were reorganised and the project's partner cooperatives disappeared to give place to new structures. In contrast, in 2014, USAID and the IFDC launched WACIP's follow-up project, the Four Country Cotton Partnership (C4CP, 2014–2018). The project's objective was to scale-up WACIP's successes by focussing on enhancing the links within the cotton value chain.

C4CP (2014–2018) adopted a different logic of intervention: *'faire-faire'*.⁴⁵ This involves subcontracting local and national organisations to implement project activities. For example, the National Association of Women Farmers of Benin (ANaF) was contracted to get involved in the project activities. The Association became an implementation partner and participated

⁴⁴ ORGP#6, 11/04/2020; MAEP#7, 21/11/2017.

⁴⁵ Which could be translated as 'make-do'.

in the elaboration and dissemination of training materials. According to the members who were involved in the process,

faire-faire is a new methodology, different from the usual... Here, the Beninese are the ones who direct the activities... The endogenous practices are there. We tried to arrange that, to adapt to our reality, and disseminate through workshops where we shared our experiences... it is an inclusive project.⁴⁶

For the ANaF and former C4CP managers, the project strategy was based on the lessons learnt from the lack of sustainability observed in WACIP. While transforming prior project arrangements, C4CP went one step further in replicating the financial provision pattern of development projects. At the time I met the ANaF team and the managers C4CP had hired, the project had just been terminated. The Association was looking for new external donors in order to replicate the training and use the material provided during the project. The project managers had already been hired in other development projects.

To summarise, the provision of resources remained the norm with the arrival of new projects and partners from the 2000s on. There have been some changes, however. On one hand, the cotton sector in Benin was in a different stage of development that required a different kind of support (as I discuss in the next chapter), with more focus on capacity-building than on direct budget support. On the other hand, the aid architecture had also evolved. Projects became smaller and more participatory mechanisms emerged within project spaces. Additionally, the focus of the initiatives in the rural sector went from state-led initiatives in the 1970s to other themes, such as poverty alleviation, sustainable livelihoods, gender equity, and good governance, from the 1990s (Ellis and Biggs, 2001). This meant that project support would go directly to the private sector, farmers' organisations, and ginning operators, instead of public entities. Nevertheless, if the receiver-end changed, the essence of projects continued to be the provision of resources, as projects continued to introduce the means that were lacking in the host context. The historical reproduction of this pattern shaped the way host actors engaged in project processes, affecting and transforming them.

PARFC and the hazards of ownership

Projects provided more than essential resources to make the organisation of the cotton sector function. Because of the gap between the financial availability within and outside project frameworks, projects became points of attraction to host actors, who tried to insert their activities within project resource frameworks, as the example of the ANaF above testifies.

⁴⁶ ORGP#2, 25/04/2018.

The attractiveness of project resources affected project processes and impact, including in the organisation of the cotton sector itself. The example of the PARFC illustrates such experience.

The PARFC (2003–2008) was an important support mechanism for the AIC, especially in its early years. It provided the means for the Association to function by providing the required financial, technical, and material support. Contradictorily, the project also contributed to aggravating a major institutional crisis that undermined AIC actions in the field for almost a decade. In that period, the AIC was composed of the three segments of the cotton sector, which were the cotton farmers, the ginneries, and the input suppliers. Each of these ‘families’, as they are called in Benin, was organised in unions from the local to the national level. Representatives of each family organisation sat on the AIC board. The growers were represented by the Federation of Unions of Farmers (FUPRO), the ginneries by the Professional Association of Ginneries of Benin (APEB), and the input suppliers by the Professional Group of Importers and Exporters of Agricultural Inputs (GPDIA). To strengthen the AIC, the PARFC aimed to support each of these organisations (Saizonou, 2015; Ton, 2004).

The FUPRO, although created from the initiative of cotton growers, assembled other farmers who do not grow cotton (FUPRO, 2016). The fact that the FUPRO was responsible for representing cotton growers at the AIC created issues of representativeness. Indeed, during the implementation of the PARFC, the FUPRO’s president was a producer of pineapple. He nevertheless represented the cotton growers at the AIC board. His position gave him power over the allocation of the resources introduced by the PARFC to strengthen cotton farmers’ organisations. The cotton growers, however, contested the decisions made by the FUPRO. According to their understanding, the project should benefit cotton growers only. Hence, the problem of representativeness and of resource allocation increased with the introduction of PARFC resources:

The resources of these projects, who will eat, who will not eat, that was what created the difficulties between farmers... As cotton growers were supported by the PARFC via the FUPRO, there were a number of resources available to them. These resources placed at the FUPRO were used in several activities that were not necessarily cotton-based.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ AIC#8, 18/04/2018.

The rush for project resources compromised project processes and the achievement of objectives. The cotton growers decided to create new cooperatives and unions to claim representation at the AIC. Alongside project resources, farmers and input suppliers had been in conflict since 2001 because of the increase in the price of fertilisers (Saizonou, 2015). The dissident groups of farmers organised informal networks of input supply with the support of suppliers, outside the input credit system managed by the AIC (Sinzogan et al., 2007). In addition to the institutional crises, world cotton prices decreased in 2004 and Beninese exports also suffered from the depreciation of the USD/XOF exchange rate (World Bank, 2008, p.6). In 2005, more than ten farmers' organisations claimed a seat at the AIC, while in 2006 the national production of cotton reached its lowest level⁴⁸ since liberalisation (AIC, 2017). The final evaluation of the PARFC assesses the project as 'moderately unsatisfactory', in elements such as borrower performance (World Bank, 2008).

From the perspective of AIC members' and farmers' representatives, however, the project enabled the strengthening of farmers' organisations and the consolidation of the AIC. This was possible mainly because of the 'fresh cash' that the project made available.⁴⁹ The provision of equipment and financial resources remained the most appreciated aspect of the project. Indeed, without projects, the cooperatives lacked resources to conduct their mission, and to organise training, field visits, and so on. A cooperative member's statement demonstrates this expectation towards projects:

We have to train the farmers because we always want to do better and better. So without training, it is not possible... There is where the [development] partners should support us. For example, now, if we could find a partner for the UD-CVPC that could help us to improve, to bring the information... we could build a library... There is also the technical material, it becomes a trademark, that lasts from generation to generation... but without the material, it cannot happen... We really want to develop, but we lack the means.⁵⁰

From his perspective, the project is the best way through which he can access funds and implement the activities under the cooperative's mandate. In this sense, the organisational problems that the PARFC triggered seemed less important than the benefits of having funds available, even if they were used to conduct activities that were not planned within the project framework.

⁴⁸ 190,866 tonnes was produced that year, against 427,159 tonnes in 2005 (AIC, 2017).

⁴⁹ AIC#8, 18/04/2018.

⁵⁰ ORGP#6, 11/04/2018.

In this section, I have described how both donors and host actors perpetuated traditional aid patterns, in spite of changes in the aid paradigm and practices. From 2009, the cotton sector in Benin began to host projects initiated by providers from the Global South. South-South cooperation processes, which claim to be different, were inserted into a context that already had a tradition of development projects and expectations towards this kind of experience. In the next section I examine the challenges that Southern projects faced when introducing new project processes in Benin.

5.2. South-South cooperation and the introduction of new practices in a traditional aid-hosting context

South-South cooperation (SSC) is not a new dynamic in the international development cooperation architecture. In the 2000s, SSC gained momentum due to the rise of some developing countries as economic powers and emerging donors – to borrow Mawdsley’s (2012) expression. Southern providers of development cooperation started implementing projects in the cotton sector in Benin in 2009. They brought to a traditional aid-hosting context distinct development practices that contrasted, to some extent, to what had been done before. The mismatch of expectations and practices sheds light on the weight of past experiences and on the possibilities of transforming regularised development cooperation practices.

5.2.1. The first batch of Southern projects

Benin started to host their first Southern cotton project in 2009, 45 years after the first cotton project in the sector. From 2009 to 2018, Benin hosted five Southern cotton projects, which presented similarities and differences. The rationale behind the projects that Brazil, China, India, and Turkey implemented was built on a claim of context-similarity between provider and host which constitutes one of the basic SSC principles. Hence, all Southern cotton projects came with a similar objective of sharing their national knowledge, experiences, and technologies with Benin, all four providers being major cotton-producing countries. In this section, I describe how these countries came to implement cotton projects in Benin, before I examine the perspectives of host actors.

Brazil’s Cotton 4 initiatives

The Brazilian C-4 Project (2009–2013) was the first SSC project to be implemented in the cotton sector in Benin. Brazil and the countries of the C-4 group started negotiating the project in 2004. The project was a direct outcome of mainstreaming issues related to the

global trade in cotton at the WTO. Two parallel processes within the WTO encouraged Brazil – and other countries later on – to implement cotton projects in African countries. On one hand, Brazil requested consultations on US subsidies to cotton producers, starting a dispute settlement procedure at the WTO that put a spotlight on Brazilian agricultural development and diplomacy. On the other hand, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mali, the main West African cotton producing countries, created the C4 group and requested that the WTO address cotton market issues specifically. The Director General of the WTO followed up on their request via the creation of the sub-committee on cotton development.

In 2004, the C-4 group sent a request to Brazil for a technical cooperation project, while the Brazil-US dispute settlement continued. At that time, Brazil was already one of the five biggest producers and exporters of cotton worldwide. National production of cotton lint went from 0.3 million tonnes in 1996 to 2.6 million tonnes in 2019 (ABRAPA, 2019), overcoming thereby two decades of crisis in the cotton sector. The increase in cotton production in Brazil stemmed from the expansion of farms to the drylands of the Brazilian *Cerrado*, a region that has a similar geography to the Sahel. In addition, technological innovations and important public investments in agricultural research supported the geographical expansion and the upsurge of cotton production. In this context, the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa) led the technological advancements that have made Brazil a global agricultural power (Cabral, 2016). Such development boosted Brazilian development cooperation initiatives in agriculture (Cabral et al., 2016; Milhorange, 2014, 2013). After five years of negotiation and exploratory missions (Menezes, 2013), the project was signed in 2009 with the objective of improving the international competitiveness of C-4 countries through the sharing of Brazilian cotton farming techniques (Plan Políticas Públicas and Articulação Sul, 2015).

The C4 Project (2009–2013) was the first Brazilian regional technical cooperation project with African countries (Plan Políticas Públicas and Articulação Sul, 2015). The activities were concentrated in Mali, where a Brazilian expert from Embrapa was based and an existing experimentation site reformed to accommodate entomological laboratories and to host training activities. The INRAB was the Beninese partner institution and CRA-CF researchers the main beneficiaries. The project did not reach farmers, extension agents, or AIC staff directly, except via the booklets of best agricultural practices jointly elaborated by researchers from all partner countries and made available in research centres.

In the meantime, the dispute settlement between Brazil and the US progressed at the WTO. Despite several appeals from the US, the WTO found consensus in favour of Brazil against US subsidies. The refusal of the US government to comply allowed Brazil to retaliate by increasing import tax for more than one hundred US goods. In 2010, the US and Brazil agreed on annual compensation of 147 million USD to Brazilian growers (WTO, 2019), 10% of which Brazil's government decided to allocate to projects in the C-4 countries, in order to share Brazilian knowledge and technology. Finally, Brazil and the US agreed on a final payment of 800 million USD, of which 80 million were allocated to SSC projects in African and Latin American countries. The allocated funds contributed to the conclusion of the C-4 project and to the elaboration and implementation of its sequel, C-4+Togo (2014–2019), launched in 2014.

China, India, and Turkey

China, India, and Turkey joined Brazil as Southern providers of development cooperation in the cotton sector in Benin in 2012. China and India are cotton world powers, being respectively the first and second world producers of cotton (ICAC, 2019). In addition, China was also the biggest importer and India the biggest exporter of cotton linters in 2017 (TTC, 2019). Turkey has a smaller production, but it is also one of the major cotton producing countries and known for high yields and lint quality (Robinson, 2012; ICAC, 2019).

In China, cotton is a traditional crop, but intensive cotton cultivation began only during the second half of the twentieth century (Dai and Dong, 2014). In that period, farmers adopted intensive farming technologies (such as plastic mulching, super high plant density technique, and grain-cotton double-cropping) that enabled national production to reach more than eight million tonnes in the 2000s (ICAC, 2019; Dai and Dong, 2014).

The central feature of China's bilateral initiatives on agriculture with African countries is to combine projects with business operations to enable financial sustainability after the end of the project (Buckley, 2013; Xu et al., 2016). Benin and China launched the Support to Cotton Production in Benin project (StCP, 2012–2018) in 2012, which aimed to support cotton production and competitiveness. A demonstration centre in Benin was built in Parakou to host training and to experiment with Chinese varieties of cotton. The project also sought to support the mechanisation of Beninese agriculture and to develop trade relations between China and Benin (Aguehoundé, 2018). In 2018, the project was extended to its second phase, which should enable the realisation of more training activities in Parakou.

In India, more than six million farmers grow cotton across three different agro-ecological regions, under irrigated and rain-fed conditions (Kranthi, 2013). The production of cotton in India has increased considerably since 2002 and the adoption of genetically modified cotton. The production of cotton lint went from 2.3 million tonnes in 2001 to 6.7 million tonnes in 2014 (ICAC, 2019). In 2017, India became the main trade partner of Benin, importing the biggest share of Beninese cotton lint (TTC, 2019).

In 2009, a visit to India by Yayi Boni, then President of Benin, consolidated India-Benin diplomatic relations. During the visit, India's prime minister announced a line of credit for the purchase of agricultural equipment (High Commission of India, 2019). Donation of medical materials and visits of Indian experts followed promptly. In 2010, Indian agronomists visited Benin to prepare the launch of the Cotton Technical Assistance Programme for Africa (C-TAP, 2012–2017), which also involved the other C-4 countries, in addition to Nigeria, Uganda, and Malawi. The objective of the project, launched in 2012, was to strengthen the competitiveness of the cotton value chain by facilitating the transfer of knowledge and technology from India (DCTD, 2015). The main activities of the project involved organising training and study tours to India for researchers and public officials from recipient countries, short-term fellowships in Indian research centres, and in-country training (Sharma, 2016).

Turkish development cooperation has a lesser Southern imprint, as it blends OECD-DAC and SSC principles (Hausmann and Lundsgaarde, 2015). Similar to emerging countries, Turkey's development cooperation expanded its geographical and thematic scope during the 2000s. In 2012, Benin sent a request to Turkey for a technical cooperation project to access Turkish knowledge and experience on cotton yield and lint quality (TIKA, 2015). Unlike China and India, the strength of Turkish cotton lies in its high yields and in the quality of the lint, ideal for textiles. The increase in national cotton production was very important to support the growing textile industry without affecting the trade balance. For its importance in the manufacturing sector, the government has supported farmers by increasing the bonuses for seed cotton and the availability of certified seeds to revive the sector (USDA, 2018). Production has oscillated in past years, but since 2011 has stabilised at around 750,000 tonnes (ICAC, 2019).

In 2012, Yayi Boni became the first Beninese president to visit Turkey. On that occasion, Yayi Boni addressed a request for a technical cooperation project to allow Benin to benefit from Turkish knowledge and experience on cotton yield and lint quality (TIKA, 2015).

Following the signing of cooperation agreements, the Cotton Farming Project (TK-CFP, 2013–2015) was launched in 2013. This project involved training workshops and study tours in Turkey and Benin. In addition, CRA-CF researchers tried Turkish varieties of cotton in their experimentation fields.

The rationale behind the projects that Brazil, China, India, and Turkey implemented in Benin is the same: to share their national knowledge, experience, and technologies with Benin. In contrast with traditional donors, Southern providers tend to focus their projects in areas in which they excel nationally. All four Southern providers of cotton projects in Benin are major world cotton-producing countries. This explains the focus on knowledge sharing through training and study tours. The experimentation with varieties of cotton stems from the narrative of shared geographies, which is embedded in the SSC context-similarity claim.

The Southern batch of projects also targeted the same beneficiaries and institutions. Although farmers were identified as indirect beneficiaries, the INRAB was the main partner institution. Brazil's follow-up project, C-4+Togo, aimed to reach more farmers, following the recommendations from the evaluation of the first phase and the requests from host countries. The second phase of China's Support to Cotton Production in Benin also intended to work more closely with farmers in the northern departments. Yet the MAEP and the INRAB remained the prioritised interlocutors. In the next section, I move to the perspectives of host countries on these projects.

5.2.2. South-South cooperation seen from the field

The Southern projects touched the groups of actors in the cotton sector to varying degrees. Even though the activities involved farmers, those I interviewed barely remembered interacting with stakeholders from the South or were not able to distinguish them from Northern projects. CRA-CF researchers and extensions agents, to a lesser extent, were the ones who got more involved in these projects. Their perspectives on Southern cotton projects provide insights into the weight of such projects in the development cooperation field, and on similarities and differences between Northern and Southern projects, and amongst Southern providers alike.

Cotton growers

When I arrived in Parakou and started meeting cotton growers, I was eager to listen to what they had to say about their experiences in SSC cotton projects. One of the first interviews I had with cotton growers was with a farmer, who had been suggested by the head of the

village cooperative as someone very well connected with foreign actors due to having participated in multiple projects. In addition, he has been hosting CRA-CF experiments in one of his plots and producing the official seeds for national distribution. In the middle of the interview, he finally mentioned Brazil, but it was a misleading hint:

I met a Brazilian team two years ago. They do organic cotton... I was part of the farmers' cooperative, so I met them as a person in charge of implementing organic cotton in our area... [They were] Brazilians and Germans. It was just a coordination meeting. They came here and they looked for us. I don't know why it didn't continue after that.⁵¹

That was the first mention I heard from farmers about an interaction with an expert from an emerging country. Yet his statement did not match the inventory of projects that I had begun compiling. I was almost sure that Brazil was not promoting organic cotton in Benin. We continued the interview, talking about how he learnt to grow cotton and about the training activities that he had attended. He enjoyed this opportunity to clarify the organic cotton training he received: 'In fact, [the training] that I mentioned earlier was to maintain the fertility of the soil without using agrochemicals... to see the advantages and disadvantages of organic cotton and chemical cotton'.⁵² Following this, he proceeded to give a detailed description of the techniques that he learnt during the activity. These were the use of cow dung, crop residues, and cover plants as organic manure, and of natural enemies for the main cotton pests. These techniques were being shared by different projects in the past ten years, but I had been informed by previous interviewees that it was Brazil's C-4 project that introduced the use of cover plants in the cotton producing system. It appeared then that the SSC experience was not a distinguishable experience, but one among many.

We continued chatting after I turned off my recorder. We talked about Brazil again, when I said where I am from. That rang a bell: he said that he had attended a workshop with Brazilian experts on cover plants. When I asked why he did not mention this experience during the interview, he said that he had forgotten. We scheduled a second interview a few months later to talk specifically about development cooperation projects.

In the second interview, the distinction between project techniques became much clearer, but the difference between Southern and Northern paradigms and practices remained blurred. At first, he could not remember the organisation who facilitated the meeting on organic cotton, but he recognised the name of CapBIO Helvetas (2011–2014) a few minutes

⁵¹ CF#3, 17/11/2017.

⁵² CF#3, 17/11/2017.

later. He remembered very well the meeting and the rules for cultivating and selling organic cotton. His interest lay in the conservation measures that he could apply in his plot. Yet he did not adopt any aspect of organic farming techniques due to the constraints it imposes (such as leaving the field unseeded for five years). Then, we moved to the Brazilian project.

His participation in a training activity of the C4+Togo project happened in October 2016. The training was about the benefits of no-till farming and the use of cover crops to improve soil fertility. The C4+Togo project considered farmers only as secondary beneficiaries. The activity lasted for one week, but cotton growers only participated in the last day. In addition, the farmers who attended were the ones that usually work with CRA-CF researchers.

The people did a whole week to train the CPV [extension agents]. We, the producers, we were called on the last day to visit the [experimentation] field. [The extension agents] were the ones who were in charge of managing us... That's was the experience I had. It was the Brazilians who carried out the project... I don't know if it's C-4 or if it's C-3 plus Togo... There is a C4 Project there... it was the reason we were there... But they targeted us, those who make the basic seed, to show how we can keep our soil fertile when we grow cotton with chemical fertilisers. That's what I remember from that experience... but there was no training with modules or documents or stuff like that.⁵³

The limited reach in regards to farmers of the C4 project was also a characteristic of the other SSC projects. In the questionnaire I conducted with 208 cotton growers, only two participants mentioned participation in Southern projects. Among extension agents, the SSC footprint is more important.

Extension agents

Extension agents were more involved than farmers in SSC projects, especially in Brazil's C4+Togo Project. China, India, and Turkey's projects did not provide broad enough opportunities to mark the life trajectories of extension agents. None of the extension agents I met had taken part in activities organised by these projects. Brazil's second project, in contrast, intended to work more closely with extension agents to enable the dissemination of the agricultural practices that researchers started experimenting with in the first C-4 project.

Thereby, Brazil's cotton projects in Benin involved extension agents in training activities and study tours in Brazil and neighbouring countries. For some of them, the project provided the only opportunity they had to travel to another country within the framework of their job.

⁵³ CF#3, 06/04/2018.

Additionally, extension agents were not usually the target population for international travel within project frameworks.

The C-4 started in Benin in 2010... or in 2008, 2010... in that period, they trained us in Parakou... it was only after that that there were activities in Bamako... In 2016 I was sent to Bamako again. Recently, in 2017, I attended training in Brazil. I did three months there... I had the opportunity to visit the cotton-producing areas of Brazil... where I understood that cotton in Brazil is really developed. I understood that cotton is a cash crop that can really allow us to value the resources in our countries.⁵⁴

Study tours in the provider country emerged as a characteristic of SSC projects, because this was not an activity ever carried out by traditional donors. (USAID projects could have organised the same kind of activity in US cotton farms, but never did.) This distinction of SSC projects is in line with the claim of context similarity that forms part of SSC principles, while being absent in the North-South development architecture. It enables SSC initiatives to overcome some barriers in the knowledge sharing process, such as the scepticism of beneficiaries towards foreign practices.

When we see an expat, all that the expatriate will tell us, whatever he is saying, we'll say 'it remains to be verified'. Or we can tell him: what happens abroad is not the same that can happen here, because there is the climate that differs and there are also the means. So, we get to show them that what's going on in their home, it's not the same that can happen here...

The only training I did with Brazilians I enjoyed so much, I always talk about that... They do everything they can to show you how they do things there and how we do things here. Then it is up to you to see how you can balance things so they can work out... The Germans do not show what's going on there. They only come to tell us 'you should do this', 'you are going to do this', and they do not come directly themselves. They take Beninese experts, doctors, experts from other countries who come to work. They just do the follow-up.⁵⁵

From the perspective of extension agents, there is more distinction between Northern and Southern cotton projects. At the level of CRAF-CF researchers, such differences become clearer.

Cotton researchers

All CRAF-CF researchers I met during fieldwork had participated in international development project activities through their career paths. Most of them had also been engaged in Southern cotton projects. Their perceptions of Southern providers demonstrate

⁵⁴ MAEP#3, 07/02/2018.

⁵⁵ MAEP#4, 09/02/2018.

the diversity of SSC in the field and both the similarity and distinctions between Northern and Southern projects.

Researchers do not see the Southern providers as a homogenous bloc when it comes to the methods of implementing projects. This also stems from their pre-conceived perceptions of country partners. The Chinese, for example, ‘worked too much in isolation’⁵⁶ and their experts lacked legitimacy, as a researcher explained:

About the Chinese, it is better to be honest... Ah, it’s hard to work with them. Well, at first, those with whom we interacted, we felt that they were not specialists in the field... There are basic elements in science that if you are a scientist and you do not know or try to contradict, we take you as someone who is not of the area. So that made us question whether they really were experts in the field... Those who were here did not allow me to do the experiments necessary to draw some notions of their method of work, even though it was very interesting for me. So, at least those we were dealing with, it was very, very, very difficult to work with them.⁵⁷

By contrast, researchers perceived the Turkish project as technically advanced. The main aspect of the TK-CF project was the transfer of Turkish varieties to Benin, since they are known for the quality of their lint. The Turkish varieties presented some elements that could enhance the ones the CRA-CF had developed. However, after conducting experiments, they found that the Beninese varieties were better adapted to the local context.

We couldn’t say what we wanted to have. When you come to a research organisation, it has to be win-win. If you come, and we see that what we have here is better, this means that we don’t have anything to take from you⁵⁸.

In the statement above, the interviewee implies that the relationships with Turkish experts were not horizontal. Later on, he completed his argument more precisely: ‘[Turkish experts] came to teach us directly the good stuff. But we cannot bring something to cotton research and say it’s good. It’s good there, but here at home, we have to test to see if it’s good.’⁵⁹ This perception indicates the reproduction of top-down relationships within Southern projects, a point in common with traditional aid patterns, echoing other research on SSC in practice (Cesarino, 2013; Taela, 2017). In one activity specifically, researchers complained that the Chinese were not open to their suggestions and did not pay enough attention to the

⁵⁶ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

⁵⁷ INRAB#2, 13/11/2017.

⁵⁸ INRAB#3, 13/11/2017

⁵⁹ INRAB#3, 13/11/2017.

characteristics of the host context. Such practice challenges the SSC principle of horizontality:

[INRAB#2] In the planting protocol that they did, we provided some amendments [but what we said] didn't have much weight. If we say that we will make such density, and they propose [a different] density, we say no. At the implementation, because we were not there – we have other tasks too – they did what they wanted.

[INRAB#3] They didn't consider the changes we proposed...

[INRAB#2] While there is a reality here in Benin that we know, and they don't.⁶⁰

Another common trait of Southern and Northern projects was the provision of material resources. Indeed, despite the focus on knowledge sharing, the provision of equipment and the construction of infrastructure also characterised Southern cotton projects. In Benin, this was mainly the case for the Chinese, Turkish, and Indian projects. The Indian C-TAP project built a ginning factory for the exclusive use of the CRA-CF. Within the StCP project, China provided trucks and built a training centre. Brazil's C4 and C4+Togo also planned to provide equipment to the mobile rural extension units, but this never materialised before the end of the period of implementation.

This shared trait with Northern providers stops at the level of the availability and management of financial resources, as a project coordinator explained:

It's not the same approach. Often, they come with their money and they spend their money. The Chinese come with their money, they spend it. The Turkish, they come with their money, they spend it. The Indian, they come with their money, they spend it... the Brazilians, they are even more serious, because they do not even come with money [laughs] it's from [Brazil] that they say what to do with the money. It's more serious.⁶¹

The relative lack of resources and the extent to which the host country had to financially contribute to project activities drew the attention of host actors. Hosts assessed the new system that Southern providers introduced by comparing it to the way traditional donors used to do things, which had become the taken-for-granted way of managing projects. Thus, an interviewee enjoyed the training he attended in India, but regretted the long travels and the lack of resources for the project: 'not even the money of the Brazilians... it is not a lot'.⁶² Similarly, a project coordinator had to deal with the dissatisfaction of participants who

⁶⁰ INRAB#2 and INRAB#3, 13/11/2017.

⁶¹ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

⁶² INRAB#1, 26/10/2017

criticised the small vehicle in which they went for a long monitoring mission in the bush within a C4+Togo project activity. According to a project expert who had navigated across multiple paradigms of aid, the Beninese counterpart expected the project to provide the vehicle, even though they were assigned this task in the project document. He explained during an interview that the resistance to taking part financially in projects usually makes the donors give the funds instead. This strategy did not work with Brazilians though, to the surprise of participants.

In addition to the relatively smaller number of resources that Southern providers introduce, the principles of management also distinguish them from traditional donors. CRA-CF researchers were used to having a budget available for conducting project activities in the field that gave them more room for manoeuvre. The fact that none of the Southern partners transferred the budget to the national counterpart was a rupture with what had been done before. For them, the benefit of the French system, and the availability of funds, is that it makes them more accountable. However,

the disadvantage is that the means are not really used to do the real work... at times we can misappropriate it to do something else with. That's when the Brazilian system becomes advantageous, because it wants to see the work done before cashing the money. The disadvantage there becomes the advantage here. Since you must necessarily get involved before you have the money. I still believe that this system is good because the project brings an innovation that we want to share. The very fact of doing it is to our advantage, so when the guys act like that, I think they are partially right too, because we have to seek our own well-being.⁶³

Similarly, Southern projects did not set up project teams in Benin or hire local staff to the same extent as other projects used to. China's StCP project team was small and composed of Chinese expatriates that hardly interacted with their Beninese counterparts, as we have seen above. Brazil's C-4+Togo hired one assistant in 2018, one year before the end of the implementation period, to support the financial management of the project. The managerial approach went against their tradition, as a project participant argued:

From a logistical point of view, their style of management does not consider our traditions here... I take a simple example, in training, there are trainers whom you invited, there are also producers whom you invited. You see? Now, in our traditions here, the trainer will be paid more than the producer. Already as a basic principle. But in their project, we found out that it's the opposite. Producers are paid more than trainers.⁶⁴

⁶³ INRAB#6, 31/01/2018.

⁶⁴ INRAB#2, 13/11/2017.

When the researcher above mentions the disrespect for traditions, he was not referring to Beninese customary rules. The tradition here is the tradition of development projects; this is the usual ways projects have been managed and implemented in Benin since the 1960s. According to project managers, farmers were paid more because they were coming from their villages to the city of Parakou. Conversely, the participation of researchers as trainers was included in the budget as working hours. Yet researchers expected to be paid separately, according to the arrangements in other projects: ‘all other projects are not like that. The payment to the trainers is put aside in the budget, hence whatever the situation, the trainer is paid more than the participant.’⁶⁵

These perspectives on SSC practice emerging from host countries mean that the volume of resources and the methods of managing projects that Southern providers introduced did not meet the expectations of host actors. From their perceptions, shaped by previous experiences, a project represents the provision of resources, illustrated by the motto ‘no project, no job’ that appeared during the first projects between 1960 and the 1980s (Mongbo and Dossou-Houessou, 2000). This is what Beninese practitioners expect before engaging in a development cooperation project, but they did not find it in Southern projects.

5.2.3. When SSC project processes meet traditional aid expectations

Some of the processes that Southern cotton projects introduced into Benin contrasted with previous experiences that had regularised practices in the cotton sector. The encounter of traditional aid and SSC principles created a mismatch of practices in the development cooperation field that affected project implementation, creating both obstacles and opportunities.

The mismatch of development practices

The shared management and funding of projects were one of the main characteristics of Southern cotton projects in Benin. As we have seen above, hosts expected projects to introduce the resources necessary to conduct project activities. Some projects also requested contributions from the host country, but this usually comes in the form of work hours and by making available durable resources, such as meeting and training rooms. In contrast, Southern projects anticipate a deeper financial engagement from the host country, a feature that goes against the history of development projects since the 1960s. For the construction

⁶⁵ INRAB#3, 13/11/2018.

of China's StCP project training centre, for example, the CRA-CF provided the land and the connection to water and electric suppliers, which cost around XOF 197 million (approximately USD 335,000).⁶⁶ But delays in the construction site combined with misunderstandings about the Chinese model of development cooperation that we have seen above hindered the relationship with host actors.

In the case of India's C-TAP project, the government of Benin was also responsible for the provision of electricity. However, CRA-CF staff encountered difficulties in the request to allocate funds from the national budget to the project, which delayed the operationalisation of the research ginnery:

The problem we had was that we asked the council of ministers at the time of the former minister, who had authorised it... but in the implementation, we still have problems. We never managed to do it. So, now we have the generator, and we can start working with that, because at the country level, you have to apply [for funding] in September and hope that it's funded in September of the following year, because it's the national budget.⁶⁷

In order to enable CRA-CF researchers to start using the ginnery immediately, the C-TAP project bought a generator to be used as a temporary solution. Both parties decided to extend the period of implementation to give time to the Beninese counterpart to finish furnishing the ginnery. According to the project focal point, the problem was that the Beninese contribution was not planned in the project document. The request for funding came late and resulted in the delays, thereby affecting the project implementation.

In Brazil's C-4+Togo project, the Beninese financial contribution was in the project document, but it has affected project processes, nonetheless. The 2018 meeting of the project steering committee took place in Lomé, Togo. The Beninese delegation was composed of three INRAB staff members, including CRA-CF researchers. The Beninese delegation requested Brazil to cover the costs related to transport to Lomé, while on the Brazilian side, it was expected that these costs would be covered by the Beninese counterpart. In the management model that Brazil introduced in the Beninese context, every activity is subject to bargaining. The officer in charge of the project in Brazil responded to the Beninese request by returning the question 'what about your contribution to the project?'.⁶⁸ Despite being reluctant, the Beninese counterpart agreed to pay for gas. Later, during an interview, one of

⁶⁶ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

⁶⁷ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

⁶⁸ IDP#9, 01/06/2018.

the participants regretted the Brazilian model: ‘they don’t bring any money... that is a problem’.⁶⁹

The consolidated expectation is that a project brings financial resources. This is what experienced Beninese practitioners expect, but they do not find it in Southern projects. One of the staff members who provided part-time support to the C-4+Togo project shared with me his impressions. He is Beninese and has worked for many years with other international development partners before working with Brazil. For him, C-4+Togo was unable to mobilise national funds because they did not invest time in playing the political game. In addition, the introduction of new patterns of relationship is often misunderstood by the local counterpart.

The missions come [from Brazil], the minister does not come. That means we do not worry about meeting at least one authority. We do everything between us. In other projects, people will try to meet the head of state, to show that it really is a matter of interest – it’s about cotton after all! For example, when the representative of Embrapa comes here, we could bring him to the presidency, so that the first authority knows what people want to do, that it is important. And it can even get people to contribute, you see. Because the contribution of the counterpart, really, in Benin, it is not easy... In the last mission I had to go to visit a field, I was with a small vehicle, a very small vehicle. When we were done, the people said: ‘You Brazilians, you cannot take something bigger? So that people are comfortable?’ Because, in principle, Benin has to provide the logistical means... in such cases, other countries would have said: ‘no, no, take the vehicle you want, we pay for it, that’s it’. We can see how easy it can be there. It is because of the mentality... Sometimes [the Beninese counterpart] has the vehicle, sometimes they even have the fuel. But when they know that when they resist a little, people give it, they are tempted to do that with any kind of partner. With Brazil, it did not work. I even saw Embrapa researchers who agreed to go on a mission in vehicles that were falling apart...⁷⁰

The introduction of processes that are distinct from usual practices affects project processes and outcomes. The mismatch between Southern and traditional practices, replicated by host actors, leads to delays in project implementation, misunderstandings about arrangements, and even resistance to participating in project activities. Paradoxically, this mismatch between host and provider practices also creates opportunities for course correction and, eventually, to fitting outcomes through unexpected ways.

⁶⁹ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

⁷⁰ IDP#7, 01/06/2018.

Fitting results through unexpected ways

The delays in the construction of the training centre planned in China's StCP project, for example, led both parties to reassess the overall objective of the project.

[The Chinese] quickly realised that the transfer of technology is not easy, that we, we have our technology and they, they have their technology, and that it is not necessarily a problem of technology, it is much more about other problems that would be good to solve. After the analyses, on their side as well as on our side, it was about how to improve the technologies that exist here, trying to see what are their shortcomings, the strengths, and weaknesses. Then comes the focus on the mechanisation of agriculture. How are we going to mechanise agriculture so as to conserve soils and achieve the expected results in a sustainable way?⁷¹

In the second phase of the project, the Beninese counterpart succeeded in shaping the project objectives according to their own interests. They would still use the facilities of the training centre, but the project leadership shifted:

We are going to recruit a mechanic and a specialist in mechanisation to work with the [Chinese] to inculcate our new vision of mechanisation. It is no longer the systematic ploughing; it is the minimum ploughing. Our mechanic will work with them to still get something out of this experience.⁷²

The implementation of Brazil's C4+Togo project also went through unplanned paths. The project planned to build five demonstration fields across cotton producing areas. This was to assess the benefits of direct seeding, cover plants, and crop rotation in cotton farming systems. It represented a big step from the first phase of the project. In addition, this made C-4+Togo become the most important SSC initiative in the cotton sector in Benin, with a large presence in the field. These plots needed to be secured with fences – which are unusual in the Beninese rural landscape – because the cattle of pastoralists particularly like the cover plants. To ensure that the animals would not compromise the experiments, the fences were a necessary condition of the successful implementation of the project. However, the mechanisms put in place for the execution of activities were inadequate. The funds for the construction of the fences should have come from Brasilia, following complicated administrative procedures that involved the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) because of the lack of specific legislation on cooperation projects in Brazil (Ferreira and Moreira, 2018; Inoue and Vaz, 2012). The Beninese counterpart had to proceed with the construction of the fences and present the invoices to the Brazilian Cooperation Agency.

⁷¹ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

⁷² INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

But the non-conformity of the paperwork sent to Brasilia created an imbroglio that compromised the realisation of activities and undermined the relationships between the partners. In August 2018, the CRA-CF was still waiting for the reimbursement for the services they had paid.

Since August [2017], we have had no funding. All the work that has been done from August to December, was supported by [Benin]. All the salaries from January until now were paid by us. To escape Brazilian bureaucracy, I am obliged to include the cost of the activities in the internal budget of the CRA-CF and to consider that the project will not reimburse us... because if you look at the mechanisms of the project, they cannot pay me back.... They say I had to make a request first to get the authorisation to make the expense... But I have already made the expense! I might start crying and begging for money... And now I have already written the name of the project on the expense, so I cannot change it anymore.⁷³

As a result, the project activities that had been planned to take place in the 2017/18 cropping season in Benin were all cancelled. The Beninese counterpart acknowledged the importance of the techniques that the project was supposed to share, but the project was at a dead end. The solution found was to incorporate the costs in the internal budget, despite the resistance to doing so.

I asked my administrative advisor to allow us to add project activities as internal activities... Everyone recognised that [the project] is good. If the donor does not want to fund it because of these procedural problems, we forget that and then we take it nonetheless... anyways, the activities will bear the logo of C-4+Togo, but in reality, there is no such thing... So, we need to find a way to mobilise funds to finance ourselves and let the project do whatever they want. If it's to make people travel, just do it whenever they want; if it is to come to train people, they just need to come here and train the people... but we must not remain dependent on the project... In the next steering committee, we will tell them that we will work without them from now on. If they join, it's good, if they do not come, it does no harm. We are going to do it anyways. We have the means to do it, so we'd better do it.⁷⁴

Through unexpected paths, host actors incorporated project activities, signalling ownership of the project's main product. In addition, Benin intended to have 20 instead of five demonstration fields in the country sharing Brazilian techniques, thereby scaling up project outreach. The combination of relevant techniques and a favourable political context made this possible. In June 2018, a Presidential decree (Government of Benin, 2016) entered into

⁷³ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

⁷⁴ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

force and increased the funds for agricultural research, giving researchers more room for manoeuvre within the cotton sector and autonomy from international partners.

The C-4+Togo project continued its own path towards completion. In the WTO's 31st Round of Consultations on Cotton Development assistance, the Beninese delegation praised Brazilian support and recognised the contribution of Brazil to the development of the cotton sector. With regards to the C4+Togo project, the Brazilian coordinator expected to finish the project by the end of 2019 and turn the page with a new bilateral project with Benin with a focus on lint quality standards, thereby continuing to write the history of development cooperation projects in the cotton sector in Benin.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the trajectory of cotton projects in Benin, including the continuities and ruptures in their mechanisms. As a consequence of their recurring presence in the host context, development projects have become an institution that donors, providers, and hosts have built. The first experiences of development cooperation in the cotton sector were a continuation of French colonial rule in Dahomey. The first project aimed to enable the French to continue administrating the production, transformation, and commercialisation of cotton. The projects that followed meant to build upon the previous project and scale it up. Although the objective was to develop cotton production in Dahomey, in fact the projects provided the indispensable resources for the cotton sector to function and make cotton an export crop. Thereby, the functioning of the cotton sector and of annexed activities, such as agricultural research, became dependent on external support. Later projects continued to provide the resources, especially financial, that the structures of the cotton sector lacked, thus creating a pattern of development practice. From 2009, more than four decades after the first cotton projects, providers from the Global South arrived in a context marked by traditional aid. South-South cooperation is based on principles that require distinct processes and relationships. However, host actors have the same expectations towards Southern and Northern projects alike, based on past experiences, all within the traditional aid setting.

While the trajectory of Northern cotton projects confirms the consolidation of a tradition in the host context, the history of SSC cotton projects sheds light on the level of consolidation of such practices. The mismatch of practices that the arrival of Southern providers created affected project processes and outcomes. This indicates the large gap between changes in paradigms and in practices, as some Southern projects reproduced traditional patterns of

relationships, and host actors embodied traditional practices when engaging with Southern cotton projects. Additionally, the trajectory of projects shows the determining role of hosts in shaping project experiences. This raises questions on the way development practitioners could envision the transformation of development practice that I discuss further in chapter 8. In the next chapter, I move from the effects of projects on subsequent projects to the ways in which other enduring institutions in the host context have incorporated project components.

CHAPTER 6. PROJECTS NAVIGATING THE CONTEXT: BUILDING THEN TRANSFORMING PREVAILING INSTITUTIONS

The effects of projects can be observed in subsequent projects and in other institutional settings in the host context. In chapter 4, the depiction of projects from the perspective of the host context shows that a project alone is too short and exclusive, which diminishes the ability of projects to change the prevailing institutions of the hosting context. Yet because of the recurrence of this kind of experience, projects introduce arrangements that become part of the repertoire of dispositions upon which project beneficiaries draw when facing situations outside project boundaries. In chapter 5, I explored how actors deploy these pieces in subsequent projects, which affect project processes and their potential impact. But actors also draw from projects to shape prevailing institutions. In this chapter, I demonstrate under what conditions development cooperation arrangements navigate across social fields, from projects to enduring structures.

I approached this question by asking many participants whether they thought that cotton projects were successful in Benin. The most common answer was that projects were good, but their effects did not last. When I asked that same question to an experienced agronomist, who had been a focal point for multiple cotton projects, he drew my attention to the importance of assessing projects against the host context, instead of against the indicators designed by the project itself. He explained that there is a distinction between the projects that were implemented in the 1960s and 1980s, that came to set up the cotton sector and make cotton an export crop, and those, much more numerous, that came later, especially the wave of projects following the C-4 initiative at the WTO in 2004, the purpose and impact of which were more diffuse. Indeed, the first batch of projects came to build the cotton sector, while the second, post-2004, came to transform it, to make it more competitive in the international market. It was very important for me to keep this distinction when I started drafting this chapter. His statement stressed the idea that not every project is the same and that such distinction is determined more by the host context than by project design itself. This provided a lens for understanding how the enduring institutions of the context incorporate project elements.

I begin this chapter by analysing the role of earlier projects in setting up cotton as an export crop. Then I turn to a later period, when the prevailing institutions of the cotton sector were consolidated as a social field and hosted multiple initiatives, selecting the pieces to assemble according to dominant interests and institutional arrangements.

6.1. Effects of early projects in a nascent industry

Early cotton projects left a mark on the host context because they enabled the setting up of cotton as an export crop. They introduced the necessary resources and arrangements and disseminated the agricultural practices required to intensify production and make cotton the main cash crop of the country. In this section, I examine the effects of the first projects and take the example of their contribution to cotton research as an illustration.

6.1.1. The first projects and the making of the cotton sector

As I show in chapter 3, at the time of the first cotton projects, cotton production in Benin was small. The many attempts of the French colonial administration to intensify production had failed until the 1950s. Production levels were low mainly because products derived from palm trees continued to be the main economic asset of Dahomey (Manning, 2004) (for example, the first World Bank project, in partnership with France, focussed on the palm sector). After independence in 1960, the French launched the first cotton project in 1963 to continue the colonial project of intensification of cotton production. To increase cotton production, the Cotton Development Project (1963–1969) focussed on implementing and organising rural extension services and the input credit system. The project, inserted within the international agenda for African agricultural development through intensification, attained its desired objective of multiplying Benin's cotton production by four through the expansion of cultivated lands and the successful introduction and promotion of a more productive variety of the plant (World Bank, 1972; Levrat, 2009).

In that period, in the absence of cotton-specific national structures, the CFDT was the main actor of the cotton sector in Dahomey. Two of the older farmers I interviewed assigned to French experts the source of their agricultural knowledge related to cotton. 'Not only did they come to buy cotton, they also taught [them] how to grow it.'⁷⁵ When I asked whether their practice had changed since they learnt how to grow cotton from the French, they said no. The only aspect that had changed was the recommended quantity of agrochemicals and that, at that time, all inputs were given for free, while nowadays they have to pay, making the farmer responsible for the correct use of inputs.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ CF#1, 25/10/2017.

⁷⁶ CF#4, 21/11/2017, CF#14, 21/11/2017, and Nansounon (2012).

From this perspective, the project played a central role in creating and enforcing this system of production, in order to make cotton the main export good of Dahomey. This objective required the standardisation of cotton production through the dissemination of established technical packages via rural extension services. This in turn entailed a restructuring of local rural arrangements. The project disregarded the existing farmers' cooperatives, through which farmers accessed credit, and set up an organisational structure by crop instead. In this new institutional setting, only cooperatives of cotton producers could have access to the input credit system. It drastically reduced the options for farmers to grow the crops of their choice – which usually tended to be subsistence crops (Mongbo and Dossou-Houessou, 2000). As a result, in the new system the project imposed, every farmer needed to grow cotton in order to be able to get the necessary inputs to grow food crops. This became the norm in the Beninese agricultural sector until the present, as cotton remains the only way to access fertilisers via credit.

With this new organisational structure, production continued to increase alongside the expansion of cotton fields until the mid-1970s, when a drought hampered the cropping season. The creation of SONACO in 1971, the first national cotton company, anticipated the rupture with the CFDT in 1975 and the transition to a nationally owned structure. However, even though SONACO became responsible for the organisation of the sector, it remained dependent on CFDT staff, who perpetuated the arrangements introduced during colonial times. Subsequent development projects continued to provide the materials and human resources required for the functioning and development of the industry, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

One of these projects was the first cotton-specific World Bank project, launched in 1972. The World Bank drafted the Zou-Borgou Cotton Project (1972–1977) in order to support the French enterprise of intensifying cotton production. Thus, the French companies, the CFDT and SATEC, were responsible for the extension services and for the commercialisation of seed cotton (World Bank, 1972). However, as the government took control of cotton-related activities, the project was terminated in 1977 and considered a failure because of the political changes. Notwithstanding, the project built the third ginnery in Dahomey, which allowed the country to match the ginning capacity with increasing production levels.

While the project stagnated, the government proceeded with a restructuring of the sector with the fragmentation of the SONACO into SONAGRI and SONACEB, the formalisation

of the village cooperatives, and the creation of the CARDER in 1975. However, following the sharp decline in cotton outputs and, as a consequence, in public revenues, the government prioritised cotton again and the World Bank prepared the Technical Assistance Project (1977–1982) to design larger rural development initiatives. Within a favourable political context, the series of World Bank rural development projects in the 1980s contributed to the cotton boom in that decade, when production went from 15,000 tonnes to more than 300,000 tonnes at the beginning of the 1990s, at the end of the Second Borgou project (Levrat, 2008; Ton, 2004).

These projects provided the means for SONAPRA, created in 1983 from the merging of SONAGRI and SONACEB, to organise the sector, ensuring the payment for purchased cotton and delivering inputs and collecting cotton efficiently. Both Borgou projects also strengthened the CARDERs' rural extension services by building regional branches and hiring personnel. All these elements incentivised farmers to join the cotton sector. In addition, the projects built ginning plants in the northern departments and transformed agricultural practices with the widespread dissemination of agrochemicals (NPK, Urea, and pesticides). Within the context of a push for an African Green Revolution (Fontaine and Sindzingre, 1991; Frankema, 2014; Harrison, 1987; Morris et al., 2007), the first Borgou project spent more on agrochemicals than on the construction of ginneries, insofar as that the quantity of NPK applied in cotton farming systems was multiplied by 3.8 and of pesticides by 6.4 (World Bank, 1992). This dynamic continued with the Second Borgou project, which involved an increase of the costs related to agrochemicals while the project costs related to labour increased at a much lower rate (World Bank, 1994).

These projects enabled the intensification of cotton production, an objective that the French colonial administration sought forty years before. They are acknowledged by local actors as having done so:

These are development projects that developed the sector. They worked a lot on rural extension, agricultural advice, and capacity-building... They actually had an impact on the results, because the production was multiplied during the time these projects were being implemented and we got results on the next decade. So, it was very good.⁷⁷

It is not surprising that partially successful projects (from the donor's perspective) left a mark on the institutions of the cotton sector in Benin in the 1970s and 1980s. These projects

⁷⁷ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

introduced the necessary resources and arrangements for the intensification of cotton farming and the making of cotton as the main export crop. As the interviewee above explained, in order to analyse the footprint of projects ‘we need to distinguish the nature of the projects’⁷⁸ and put it in the perspective of the host institutions. In the case of the first projects, they contributed to building such institutions almost from scratch, and they were able to do so by imposing new arrangements on the host context.

At the time of liberalisation in the 1990s and change of paradigms in the rural development sector, cotton was already the main export good of Benin, the only organised agricultural sub-sector, and an object of struggle for the national elites due to its having become an important source of public revenue (World Bank, 1989). The privatisation of input supply activities first, then of ginning few years later, created a new environment that required a new organisation, hence the creation of new structures which required assistance. In this context, the World Bank launched the Cotton Sector Reform Project (PARFC) in 2003 to support the continuing operationalisation of the cotton industry. The financial resources the project brought to the AIC in the form of budget support led to an unprecedented crisis among members (as I have presented in chapter 5). A member of staff from the AIC acknowledged, however, that the project was essential in enabling the nascent organisation to run:

It is true that there was some fresh money, say, to have resources to structure [the Association] – because the AIC was at its beginning when the World Bank project was implemented. There was almost nothing then. The implementation of manuals of procedures, everything that is organisational, it was with the support of the World Bank that it was put in place. Even the first technical AIC staff had been recruited thanks to these funds... For example, to establish that the AIC had to charge an amount for every kilogram of seed cotton sold, it was a study funded by the programme. And how this amount should be used is a study that indicated that. So, it is practically this programme that has put in place the whole structure of the AIC, that is undeniable.⁷⁹

Similarly, France implemented PARSC (2004–2009) to provide resources to the AIC. The project enabled the creation of a communication section within the Association and planned to conduct studies and analyses to provide insights to and instruct the AIC’s work. Most of the studies and analyses were cancelled because none of the tenders matched the requirements, but the staff hired to lead the communication section performed as expected,

⁷⁸ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

⁷⁹ AIC#8, 18/04/2018.

especially though the production of many outreach products, such as newsletters and other regular publications.

The role of these projects and of the first wave of projects in the 1970s and 1980s in building the sector and ensuring its functioning demonstrate their weight in the history of the cotton sector, especially at critical junctures (the initial push for intensification and the rebuilding after liberalisation, for instance). In other words, the development projects I have discussed in this section introduced the resources and arrangements needed to achieve the objective of making cotton the main cash crop and export good of Benin and maintaining it as such. The building of a high-performing cotton research centre followed the same logic.

6.1.2. Projects and the building of cotton research

In the 1990s, Beninese agricultural research, including the CRA-CF, was consolidated. In spite of the dependence on external funding, experienced agronomists composed the CRA-CF, most of them having graduated from the University of Abomey-Calavi, renowned for its curriculum in agronomical sciences and nutrition. The three divisions of the Centre (production, pest management, and genetic improvement), inherited from the French model, performed well, especially with regards to the dissemination of planting protocols through the ITK and the experimentation with and accreditation of agrochemicals. However, the activities in the genetic improvement division were limited to trials of foreign varieties of cotton in order to identify and promote the most productive ones. There were no plant breeding programmes, even though this constitutes one of the main activities of an agricultural research centre. In this context, two French projects starting in the 1990s implemented practices and processes that the CRA-CF needed but lacked in order to become a high-performing agricultural research centre. These projects have left a strong footprint in the prevailing context despite their innate ad hoc features.

The Support to Benin's Agricultural Research Project (PARAB, 1996–2000) was the first project France launched after the liberalisation of the cotton sector. It was implemented by CIRAD and involved the placing of two French researchers in CRA-CF branches to work closely with local researchers, with the objective of strengthening cotton research. The project adopted a 'participatory genetic improvement approach' which started with random crossing of fourteen varieties from Togo, Cameroon, Senegal, Australia, the US, and Argentina, selected according to their features (Lançon et al., 2004). The resulting cultivar was tried out in four plots, one in the Okpara CRA-CF experimentation centre and three in the fields of volunteer cotton farmers across the country – hence the participatory feature of

the programme (Bruno et al., 1999). Each farmer planted 1,000 plants and selected 200 according to the criteria of productivity established by the project. The volunteering farmers also participated in technical activities led by the experts. At the end of the project, three groups of varieties had been created, according to their performance in the three ecosystems. Besides plant breeding, the project also provided long-term scholarships for Beninese agronomists to pursue postgraduate studies in France. A follow- and scale-up project enabled the continuation of this practice for another five years.

While cotton research was the main target of PARAB, the Cotton Research Support Project (PARCOB, 2001–2006) aimed to expand project scope and targeted beneficiaries. In addition to the continuation of the participatory plant breeding programme and the general support provided to the CRA-CF (scholarships, refurbishment of buildings, and placing of French experts), the project promoted methods of ‘agroeconomic diagnostics’ among farmers in the main cotton-producing zones and aimed to strengthen the multi-stakeholder coordination of knowledge diffusion. By these means, the project contributed to promoting the work of CRA-CF researchers in the field. (I was surprised when I realised that PARCOB was a well-known initiative in the northern regions when I conducted fieldwork more than ten years after the end of the project in 2017/18.)

PARAB and PARCOB’s impact was widely recognised by CRA-CF researchers. These projects emerged as the most successful projects they have experienced – though not every aspect of them. The introduction to Benin of a plant breeding programme was the main contribution. For key informants, there is a before and an after PARAB and PARCOB in Beninese cotton research, as a senior researcher of the Centre explained:

In the past, we used to make adaptations from foreign varieties, but since 1996 the centre has conducted its own cotton breeding programme... It was with the French that we set up this programme. Now, we have multiple varieties in our Centre and three that are promoted.⁸⁰

Indeed, the national cultivars of cotton that the CRA-CF started to develop in 1996 were introduced in the official technical itinerary in 2014.⁸¹ Before that, only one variety was promoted for all the producing zones of the country. The gap between the beginning of the programme and the actual distribution of national varieties demonstrates that the project

⁸⁰ INRAB#1, 26/10/2017.

⁸¹ INRAB#7, 27/03/2018.

effects lasted beyond their own time frame. The processes that the projects introduced were incorporated into the prevailing structures.

However, at the moment of the closure of PARCOB, the sustainability of the project's results was the main concern of the stakeholders gathered in Cotonou for a restitution workshop in 2006. In the final report (Lançon and Hougni, 2006) the participants criticised the lack of government support and the vulnerability of the local staff who had been involved since PARAB. The final recommendations endorsed an increase of the CRA-CF's budget and three new projects to work on academic exchange, multi-stakeholder platforms, and cotton quality. None of these projects were approved, but the project's effects endured, nevertheless.

The question about the durability of these projects was at the heart of a debate among researchers during a focus group discussion. In the discussion, members who have benefited from these initiatives praised the durability of processes beyond the project structures and the need to distinguish these from other cotton projects. Conversely, other participants challenged their views, highlighting the limitations of development projects:

INRAB#4: In fact, [PARCOB and PARAB] are not projects like the other projects, it is a specific research project... we were able to train people in this project, so that's what made it durable, unlike other projects, development projects, you see, this kind of project, the strategy is not necessarily the same... at our level, we still continue to reap the benefits of these projects that have passed, so we continue the actions in this same direction.

INRAB#6: In the framework of PARAB, PARCOB, for example, as we have the need to select and create varieties, despite the fact that the project is gone, it continues... people have been trained – because it is specific. In other cases, if in the end people do not adopt it, it is because they do not need it.

INRAB#8: I do not agree. I do not agree, because, look, in PARCOB, PARAB there, those whose skills needed to be improved and who saw their skills improved, we can count it at the ends of the fingers. It's a very small research team. So the mechanism is such that, with or without the project, there would be a plant breeding section, which would have resources that would always be allocated to the tests, to the selection.⁸²

In the exchange above, the participants put forward some elements that explain the perpetuation of the processes that PARAB and PARCOB introduced. First, there was an inescapable need to have a plant breeding team within the CRA-CF. Second, the area of intervention of these projects was very specific, but so was the final targeted population (a

⁸² Focus group with CRA-CF agronomists on 09/04/2018.

handful of researchers). This means that the project did not need to reach a large number of people in order to have an impact. Third, the project found a consolidated anchoring structure – the CRA-CF – to host and carry on the activities beyond the lifespan of the project. This allowed a relatively modest project (USD 340,000 over five years) to durably introduce new processes into the Beninese agricultural research institute.

As the research participants above declared, these processes continued, but not without adaptation to the context conditions. Even though PARAB and PARCOB introduced new practices and processes that became durable, such processes had to adapt to the host context's arrangements and resources. In 2018, I followed CRA-CF researchers' work on cotton breeding, and they pointed to the scarce resources they enjoyed as the main obstacle to carrying out all the protocols and methods in the same way they were established by the projects. They were not able to conduct as many field visits as required, and the authorised period of each visit did not allow them to supervise all experimentation fields. Therefore, the resulting practice was an adaptation of the project experience to their prevailing conditions – or a combination of project elements with the tools and components available beyond the project time frame.

In spite of adaptation, the consolidation of a plant breeding programme by the French set the standard and framework for later projects intervening in this same area. Once a mechanism is in place, the adoption of new components can be scrutinised before being considered for adoption and adaptation – instead of being incorporated without a baseline, as in the first projects. Thus, when the Turkish Cotton Farming Project started in 2013, aiming to introduce new cotton varieties in Benin, the local varieties that the CRA-CF had developed since 1996 'were much better than the Turkish ones'.⁸³ Thanks to PARAB and PARCOB, 'it is hard to bring a variety from elsewhere that can be competitive in [their] system. [Cotton breeding] is the sector where CRA-CF has invested the most in the last 20 years'.⁸⁴ Such developed expertise allowed the Beninese researchers to unpack the project 'package' that Turkey offered. Although the Turkish varieties of cotton were known for high yields and quality of fibre, the Beninese researchers were particularly interested in their earliness at boll opening and harvesting. These characteristics could be an asset to help farmers face the challenges emerging from climate change and late rainfall. PARAB and PARCOB have given CRA-CF researchers the ability to unpack technologies and select what

⁸³ INRAB#3, 13/11/2017.

⁸⁴ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

they take from them, thereby doing bricolage as an everyday response to changing circumstances (Cleaver, 2012).

The example of plant breeding development in cotton research also confirms what my informant told me about the differences between the projects pre- and post-2004. While PARAB and PARCOB contributed to setting up a method of functioning, later projects have had to fit in the structures that earlier projects contributed to building.

6.2. Project effects in a consolidated sector

It was a very different host context that donors and providers found from the 1990s on when compared with the first projects of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The agricultural practices that earlier projects introduced into the cotton sector were consolidated. From that moment on, projects became less and less dominant in the field. However, following the creation of the C-4 initiative at the WTO in 2004, cotton gained weight in the international development cooperation system. The multiplication of projects and partners increased the supply of arrangements from which local actors could draw in order to respond to changing circumstances. If this led to confusion with regards to each project's identity and their singular contribution, the upsurge also contributed to mainstream concerns that many actors of the sector had shared for a long time but that remained unaddressed. This section focusses on the conditions under which development partners implemented cotton projects, when the latter was a consolidated sector within Beninese economy and society.

6.2.1. PADSE and the attempt to change consolidated cotton farming practices

With regards to agricultural practices, we saw that the colonial power and the first cotton projects encountered difficulties in transforming the way farmers grow cotton. Such changes required many interventions and a deep restructuring of rural institutional arrangements to tie rural credit to cotton farming. In the 1990s, the World Bank projects, with French support, had succeeded in intensifying production by introducing new varieties and promoting the use of agrochemicals.

Within this context of increasing use of agrochemicals and of the projectivisation of aid, which reduced the size and scope of programmes, we see appearing the first initiatives that diverged from the path of intensification. In 1996, the Beninese Organisation for the Promotion of Organic Agriculture (OBEPAB) started experimenting with organic cotton with seventeen farmers. Following the pilot phase, the Netherlands funded a project to

support this initiative from 1998 (OBEPAB and KIT/NIPS, 2004). Despite low yields and prices at the beginning, Benin became the first African country to be a producer of organic cotton (Levrat, 2009). However, production of organic cotton never took off in the following years. It remained small-scale in comparison with conventional cotton.⁸⁵

Also in 1998, French researchers introduced an alternative pest management technique. In that year, local researchers started experimenting with staggered pest control techniques (LEC) in Benin (Togbé, 2013), but the technique reached farmers only a decade later through PADSE (1998–2005), a French project led by the AFD and CIRAD. The objective of the project was to diversify and improve farming systems with a clear focus on the cotton sector, since cotton was the main crop in the recipient areas. The project worked with the CARDERs, the INRAB, the CRA-CF, and the AIC, from 1999. The introduction of LEC and the capacity-building of agents on the technique was the main component of the project.

As presented in chapter 4, the LEC consists of a pest control technique that involves the application of pesticides only when the infestation of the plant reaches a threshold. This technique contrasts with the pest management instructions of the ITK, in which seven treatments are scheduled in advance every fortnight regardless of the condition of the plants⁸⁶ – whether they are infested or not, farmers are instructed to proceed with the treatment. Based on the ITK, farmers place their orders for pesticides according to the size of their cotton fields. Considering the prices fixed by the government for the 2017/18 season, the cost related to pesticides alone corresponded to 45% of the debt a cotton farmer contracted in the input supply system. In addition, the application of such substances has potential negative effects on human health, especially in the absence of personal protective equipment (Adechian et al., 2015; Glin et al., 2006; Gouda et al., 2018).

Therefore, the LEC had the potential to bring great benefits for farmers. The moderate use of pesticides could have an immediate effect on their profits, by reducing the cost of production; and in terms of their health, by decreasing contact with agrochemicals. The technique kept its promises during the implementation of the project, and the term ‘LEC’ became popular among cotton growers in the districts that hosted activities. Yet the technique was never incorporated into the ITK nor officially incentivised through extension services. The promotion of the LEC required the training of ‘observers’ to carry out the

⁸⁵ In 2018, OBEPAB continued to disseminate organic agricultural techniques and to receive funds from the Netherlands and organisations from the United Kingdom and France.

⁸⁶ See Appendix A.7.3 for more details on the ITK.

diagnostic in the fields, count the population of pests, and, based on that, advise farmers regarding the application of pesticides. The observers were also responsible for accompanying groups of LEC farmers in the application of the technique. According to Togbé (2013, p.37), ‘the very success of the LEC depends on the reliability of the scouting and, in the absence of a professional scouting service, this rests on the intrinsic performance of each farmer, i.e. on individual competence’. Therefore, the success of the project relied on multiple factors that extrapolated the scope of the project, such as the ability of agents in transferring the technical knowledge to farmers, the extra resources for LEC extension agents, the availability of specific pesticides for different cotton pests, and the willingness of farmers to carry out all the steps by themselves without project incentives.

The incorporation of the LEC into the ITK could have had a great impact on the cotton production systems. In the long term, it could also have increased the quality of the lint, thus benefiting the industrial elites as well. From the perspective of actors based in Cotonou, the reasons for the failure are to be found in the complexity of the LEC and its constraints. Hence, for one AIC staff member, the poor instruction of farmers was the cause, since the technique was too complicated for them:

Because it requires, first, the know-how of the producer in the identification of the pests, they must come to make observations in the fields, they cannot come to treat anyhow. He must observe, count, to see the number of insects present and the types of insect present. So according to the types of insect that he will find in the field, he will have a different product. It's not easy. Now, the [conventional] method says: you do seven treatments every two weeks... the first three treatments and the first two treatments you use such and such a product. He just goes and he applies every two weeks, it's easy, huh? But the other [method] says: you have to make observations every week, if there is a problem, you make the treatment... it's not easy. The producer does not have the time – they have a lot of things to do and they are not so organised, it's also a bit of a spontaneous organisation... and there is also ignorance.⁸⁷

He also highlighted that the extra work that the technique imposes, for example the need to scout the fields every week, discouraged many of the farmers from adopting the technology. Indeed, in many cases, farmers have their fields dispersed around the district and only visit their plots when strictly necessary.

Another reason mentioned regarding the failure of the LEC was the lack of LEC-specific pesticides after the end of the project. When the LEC was promoted, PADSE introduced

⁸⁷ AIC#3, 21/11/2017.

new packages of pesticides that were branded as LEC-specific. At the end of the project, the input importers stopped the provision of LEC products, significantly less expensive than traditional products, leaving the groups of LEC farmers with no other choice than reverting to conventional pest management practices. Many agents informed me that the unavailability of LEC products was the main bottleneck preventing widespread adoption. This was the common argument that I heard from farmers, farmers' organisations, researchers, extension agents, AIC staff, and public officials.

However, according to an LEC specialist, the adoption of the method does not depend on the availability of specific products. In fact, the method is rather a *démarche*, in which the farmer observes his field before the treatment. An LEC agent insisted that a farmer does not need specific products to adopt the technique, 'because the LEC means targeted control. If a farmer observes his plot before treating, he is already doing LEC'.⁸⁸

For the former LEC agent, the LEC failed precisely because the project linked the method with specific products. To counter this widespread and consolidated idea that linked the LEC with unavailable pesticides, the CRA-CF hosted a regional project to disseminate the LEC without specific products. The GIRCOT project (2013–2016) was funded by CORAF, a regional platform of agricultural research institutes and was part of a larger initiative, the Regional Integrated Cotton Protection in Africa Programme (PR-PICA), which is funded by multiple private and public donors (COS-Coton, 2015; Sawadogo, 2015). GIRCOT was implemented in six different countries and aimed to develop sign cards and practical guides, and to organise capacity-building activities addressed to growers and extension agents. However, the prolonged dissemination failed again in mainstreaming the LEC in the official ITK, in spite of its popularity among farmers, as a former LEC agent explains:

Many do not know PADSE. In the cotton [sector] we talk about LEC, and when we say LEC, immediately we must refer to PADSE... that was a thing at the time. The benefits are still there... The gains of the project are there. Farmers know, only that we, the decision makers, have to make the decision to continue the technology. Then the farmers will follow... they are ready to continue.⁸⁹

Since the CRA-CF is responsible for drafting and suggesting modifications to the ITK, I asked him why the LEC remained excluded from the conventional methods being disseminated. He explained that 'they can put forward a technology... but without support

⁸⁸ INRAB#4, 20/11/2017.

⁸⁹ INRAB#4, 20/11/2017.

it will not work'. Indeed, the conflict of interest was obvious: 'input importers didn't sell enough products during the project. They would not accept the introduction of a technology that would allow farmers to use less agrochemicals'.⁹⁰ A senior researcher confirmed this divergence of interests:

The project enabled farmer to buy less products. When that became an issue between input importers and farmers... [he raised his two hands as in a scale to show the difference in weight of farmers and input importers] Do you see? [laughs] The input importers won... It was a big money business!⁹¹

Another agent mentioned the power asymmetries that govern the elaboration of the ITK: 'maybe [the AIC] plays a double game with us. Anyways, we don't have the force to contradict input importers'.⁹² Although the adoption of this method required important changes in farmers' agricultural practice, decision makers opted to neglect it instead of providing incentives in that sense, lest the LEC would compromise their revenues and control over the cotton sector.

To summarise, the powerful actors of the sector hindered the large-scale adoption of a technique that could improve the life conditions of farmers. However, the LEC example also shows that structural changes are more complex than just a matter of elite interests. For instance, the widespread adoption of the LEC required changes in traditional agricultural practices that even farmers, as the main beneficiaries, were not completely ready to adopt.

In the trajectory of projects, PADSE stands alone as the first challenger initiative to the continuous spread of agrochemical use in Benin. However, at the turn of the century, the increase in projects and partners enabled the introduction of more conservation agriculture techniques.

6.2.2. Expanding the toolbox: The multiplication of projects, partners, and opportunities

The years that followed the creation of the C-4 group at the WTO correspond to the increase in cotton projects in Benin. In 15 years since the set-up of the C-4 Sectoral Initiative on Cotton at the WTO in 2004, Benin hosted twenty-two projects in partnership with nine different countries and organisations – prior to that period, Benin had hosted only 10 projects, with three different partners, in 45 years. The number of projects from 2004 to

⁹⁰ INRAB#4, 10/11/2017.

⁹¹ INRAB#1, 26/10/2017.

⁹² INRAB#8, 10/11/2017.

2018 corresponds to more than two-thirds of the total of projects development partners implemented in the cotton sector in nearly 70 years.

These projects arrived in a moment in the country's institutional history when the institutions of the cotton sector were consolidated. Hence, from the country's perspective, it is possible to distinguish them from the projects that preceded, as suggested by a cotton researcher:

All projects that arrived after 2004, 2005, or 2006 are part of the C-4 initiative with the objective of helping the sector to compete in the international market... So, their goal is clear enough: there was no question of coming to give resources to the actors on the ground, no, it was not that. The question was which lever we should emphasise so that the cotton that is produced is competitive in the international market. Every actor, every project has tried to contribute to specific goals under this overall goal.⁹³

Indeed, the post-Cancun batch of projects shared the same focus on fighting soil depletion through the dissemination of sustainable soil management practices among farmers, whereas previous projects had focussed on providing the required means for the functioning of national organisations. The development goal remained the same throughout the periods, however: to reduce poverty in rural areas by increasing cotton production and, thereby, farmers' income. Therefore, all projects differed slightly, while disseminating one common idea: the combination of organic and chemical fertilisers to preserve and restore the soil, either by the adoption of compost, animal manure, cover crops, or seedlings under mulch. A high-level AIC staff member observed this phenomenon as follows: 'there are lots of projects, and each one comes with a different technique, thinking it is the best one'.⁹⁴

Despite varying techniques, improving soil fertility remained a common goal. The level of redundancy and repetition was high, raising the challenge of coordination among partners and of achieving the singular relevance of each project. The multiplication of projects and the similarity among them surprised a project manager, who wondered 'whether there were differences between what [they] and the others were doing'.⁹⁵ When I asked an experienced extension agent about the real differences between projects, his statement ended up illustrating the similarity instead of the differences between the initiatives, all of which worked on soil depletion:

the difference is that at the level of IFDC, integrated soil fertility management, we apply certain concepts in relation to different plants that can improve soil fertility. While with GIZ, it's much more conservation measures.

⁹³ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

⁹⁴ AIC#5, 26/03/2018.

⁹⁵ IDP#7, 06/10/2017.

So, there are mechanical methods of soil conservation that have been taught to the farmers also. We did a lot. I also worked with the project... we call it WACIP. Do you know WACIP? It's an American project... in WACIP we also worked on cotton to increase yields. So the main fertiliser is often organic manure, and this organic manure can be cow dung or crop residues... so that's what they do, their approach.⁹⁶

The West African Cotton Initiative Partnership (WACIP, 2006–2013) was a project funded by USAID and implemented by the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC), a US-based organisation specialising in the development of agricultural fertilisers. As I presented in the previous chapter, WACIP's objective was to reduce poverty by rendering agriculture sustainable and strengthening small farmers' capacities through the improvement of better management of resources. Between 2006 and 2009, the IFDC was also implementing a project funded by the Netherlands, which aimed to improve the competitiveness of the cotton sector, including the objective of promoting technologies to fight soil depletion in cotton-producing areas. GIZ's ProSol project, also mentioned by the interviewee, only started in 2016 and is expected to run until 2021. Although the project focusses on a variety of crops, it inevitably benefits many cotton growers because of the prominence of the crop in the regions where the project is implemented.

In the above-mentioned statement, it was not clear whether the agent was making a difference between IFDC-Netherlands and WACIP/IFDC, or if he was mixing up the two projects – something I observed in many interviews with actors in the field, especially farmers and extension agents. This is not to imply that these projects had no importance in hosts' life experiences. To the contrary, some initiatives – such as WACIP (2006–2013), COMPACI (2009–2012), PROCOTON (2006–2013), ProSol (2016–2021), and GIPD (2007–2012) – became very popular among actors in the field because they prioritised reaching farmers and extension agents directly. Indeed, the abundance of initiatives marked a period of vast resources and opportunities.

When we were recruited in 2007, it was really good, it was a good time, because at that moment there were projects and programmes. We had the WACIP project, funded by the World Bank [*sic*] that regularly supported us. We were recruited, we had no experience, we were called all the time for training. But, with time, WACIP finished, and the PAFICOT project came, always on cotton. It went on with the same activities that WACIP was doing.⁹⁷

During this period, we, field agents, we did not complain.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ MAEP#5, 07/04/2018.

⁹⁷ MAEP#7, 21/11/2017.

⁹⁸ MAEP#8, 21/11/2017.

However, the multiplication of partners and projects, and the similarity between them, confused some actors in the field, who mixed projects, providers, and periods of implementation, as though every project were more or less the same. Indeed, differently from the statement above, USAID funded WACIP – not the World Bank – and PAFICOT was not a follow-up initiative, but a regional project that the African Development Bank implemented across cotton-producing West African countries. Because the majority of these initiatives were implemented in the same period and worked on the same object (soil depletion), some features of projects, such as sponsors and logos, dear to donors and providers, became almost irrelevant in the lived reality of the field. This is not to imply that national stakeholders disregarded the importance of projects. From the receivers' perspective, every project was good, even though they could not distinguish the differences between them.

Post-2004 projects received positive feedback from beneficiaries because they represented opportunities for extra resources and because they addressed soil depletion, a problem that researchers, extension agents, and farmers faced in the field. In addition, the regularity of projects lent a consistency to the sector while it was going through a profound crisis. The period of the upsurge of projects also corresponded to a decade of institutional and political instability that compromised the delivery of agricultural inputs and the payment to farmers for the cotton sold. Many farmers abandoned the sector due to the low yields provoked by soil depletion and administrative uncertainty. As a consequence, the production of seed cotton decreased to its lowest levels since it was introduced as a cash crop by the French in the 1950s, reaching only 131,000 tonnes in 2011, against an average of 370,000 tonnes in the period 2000–2005 (AIC, 2017). In addition, the search for fertile lands in the main cotton-producing areas had been pushing farmers to invade protected areas, reclaiming land in forests far from their villages (Chougourou et al., 2008; Vodounou and Onibon Doubogan, 2016). This expansion has also become a source of conflict among farmers, as well as perpetuating conflicts between farmers and pastoralists (Bierschenk, 1995; Lesse et al., 2016). An improvement in soil fertility was to the benefit of all stakeholders: farmers would no longer need to seek fertile land, and improved agricultural techniques could also increase the quality of the lint, being the main interest of lint exporters.

Given this context, cotton growers acknowledged the need to change their agricultural practices. They were the ones who noticed the depletion of the soil and felt the harms of agrochemicals on their body, land, and finances. Yet farmers faced many obstacles to reducing the use of agrochemicals and adopting conservation agriculture practices. For

example, several projects disseminated the use of animal manure as an organic fertiliser. However, only a few farmers were able to adopt this practice because many of them lacked enough livestock to use as a source of organic fertiliser. A farmer who was acquainted with this technical option exposed some barriers:

Ah, we do not have any [animal manure] ... Because we count a lot on the Fulani [pastoralists], but the Fulani do not stay on the spot, they are obliged to go to the protected forests... Those who are fortunate enough to have [livestock] and to store fodder, they can benefit from that. But that's not enough... also, the things of the toilets there, when you empty your toilets, some producers use that now. This also enriches the soil, but many do not like it [laughs].⁹⁹

Practical obstacles and meanings hindered the adoption of soil conservation and restoration techniques more than a lack of knowledge. Indeed, many farmers were aware of alternatives to chemical fertilisers, but only a few were able to apply them. For example, another source of natural manure is to make compost with crop residues. Yet the adoption of this technique requires extra resources which are often lacking among cotton growers. A farmer in the Atacora department adopted the technique, but acknowledged its difficulties:

In this technique, you have to make a pit. You put the stems, the poop of the animals, and you put the water. In three months after it will rot and you will spread it on the field, even if you have not used the fertiliser, it can work. I do that... The only thing is that it's a bit difficult. You have to have materials to be able to do so. When it's going to rot, you have to have wheelbarrows with which you will pick up. It is not easy, but it is good.¹⁰⁰

These techniques are well known by farmers, extension agents, researchers, and AIC staff. A member of the Beninese Organisation for the Promotion of Organic Agriculture (OBEPAB) claimed that their organisation introduced composting and animal manure in the cotton sector in Benin during the 1990s.¹⁰¹ However, farmers, extension agents, and AIC staff linked these techniques to more recent projects such as WACIP, COMPACI, and ProSol, which are all part of the post-2004 batch of projects. Meanwhile, agronomists argue that they have been testing these and other alternative fertilisers with different partners for years.¹⁰² For instance, current CRA-CF experiments involve the association of food crops with cover plants that can be disposed on cotton fields to protect the soil and restore nutrients. Researchers associate the introduction of this technique with Brazil's C-4 project, but the

⁹⁹ CF#4, 21/11/2017.

¹⁰⁰ CF#7, 08/02/2018.

¹⁰¹ ORGP#5, 07/08/2018.

¹⁰² INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

CRA-CF has been implementing it with different partners and expected to disseminate it further to reach more farmers in the following years.

It is clear that the upsurge in projects contributed to spreading knowledge of conservation agriculture among the actors of the cotton sector. Even though final beneficiaries could not distinguish each project individually, these initiatives were well received and benefited from positive perceptions in the field, which potentially could favour the transformation of dominant agricultural practices.

6.2.3. Changing the cotton sector with project contributions

The post-2004 batch of projects focussed on the introduction and dissemination of alternative agricultural techniques. However, the way farmers grew cotton continued to be determined by the technical itinerary (ITK): the official guidelines for cotton production, elaborated by researchers and agreed by MAEP's Direction of Agriculture and the AIC before reaching farmers through rural extension services. Indeed, due to its institutional weight and influence over agents and farmers, the ITK has a determinant impact on agricultural practices, which suggests that it is the main tool for transforming practices on a large scale: a change in the ITK would become the norm and disseminated through all extension agents across the country. However, international partners are not directly involved in its elaboration nor in its promotion. The most significant changes adopted in the ITK since the post-2004 boom of projects related to the increase of the dosages of agrochemicals and to the introduction of regional varieties of cotton. None of the conservation agriculture techniques shared by development projects and well known to many actors and decision makers of the sector were considered. It is thus not surprising that these techniques are still seen as secondary options by farmers, extension agents, AIC staff, and researchers.

This static situation would start to change from 2016. Patrice Talon, 'king of cotton', was elected in March 2016, just before the beginning of the cotton cropping season, and in April re-established the AIC –suppressed by his predecessor Thomas Yayi Boni – to organise the sector and ensure the timely provision of inputs. In that same year, the AIC launched a self-funded initiative that they called 'Intensification of Cotton Production'. The programme worked with volunteer farmers who would adopt changes in their agricultural practices. The main aspect of the programme was an increase in the use of agrochemicals (50 kilograms extra of NPK) while incentivising farmers to combine these with organic fertilisers. The combination of chemical and organic fertilisers was the main innovative aspect of the

programme but remained a suggestion to the pool of volunteers. The sources of organic manure in the programme were the same that some development projects had been sharing for a decade: animal dung and crop residues. In addition to producing their own manure, the volunteers also received a bale of organic manure for free. As an official policy disseminated through the prevailing structures, the programme reached 15,363 farmers in the 2017/18 cropping season (AIC, 2017, p.20).

The good results of the 2016/17 season encouraged the AIC – which was then fully running again – to continue and expand the programme in the next season. In the second year of the programme, Beninese farmers produced 597,000 tonnes of seed cotton, and the average yield exceeded 1,200 kilograms per hectare (instead of 830kg/ha in 2016). This was the highest amount of cotton Benin had produced in a year since the introduction of the crop.

When the results were published, I was eagerly looking for explanations that linked development projects to the intensification programme, and thereby to the unprecedented growth in production. Instead, the collective voice of the AIC, farmers, and researchers suggested that the main factors of success were the favourable climate conditions that they enjoyed during that season, the effective distribution of agricultural inputs, and the provision of food fertilisers through the same cotton input supply system – which contributed to reducing the reallocation of fertilisers destined for cotton to food crops. Some of these reasons do stem from the intensification programme but have little to do with development projects. A CRA-CF researcher, in an attempt to take credit for the good results of the harvest, implicitly stated that changes in the functioning of the cotton sector are nurtured in the long term, and that these cannot be linked to a development programme alone nor to a national policy such as the AIC's intensification programme:

Well, in fact, last year they had committed to intensification. But in reality, it's not intensification, it's support for the adoption of technologies, it's support for the adoption of the technical itinerary, because talking about intensification sounds like they invented something... but they didn't, neither in approach nor in technology... they invented nothing. It was us [cotton research] who have put in place the new dosages of fertilisers that were adapted to the different regions... Also, we have worked with USAID on the use of compost, green manure, all that to boost production, so if their so-called intensification programme is asking the producer to use the dosage of fertiliser recommended by the research, with fertiliser formula recommended by research, and bring organic manure to the soil... there is no project. What has increased production is that we have increased the dosages of agrochemicals, and we asked people, as far as possible, to bring in organic

manure, hence the total amount of fertilisers brought to the cotton plant increased.¹⁰³

Notwithstanding this, the inclusion of organic manure in such an important programme as the AIC's represents a change that is part of a general policy reorientation of the cotton sector towards sustainable agricultural practices. An AIC agronomist exposed this point while acknowledging the challenges for the adoption of conservation agriculture practices:

When we talk about intensification we must not impose, because there are constraints. If you have to go for debris and cow dung to throw on your field, or even compost, it's an extra effort, so it has to be really voluntary, it has to be the producer who is convinced that he needs that. But we are particularly insisting on the interest of the producer to do it, because we think it is more profitable and it is more and more where we wish to go. Especially since the AIC started to consider sustainable land management measures and even adaptation to climate change. Hence, in relation to these concerns, staff have already been trained to really achieve real changes at the level of the producers, more and more, so that we do not destroy the soil. The farmer must be careful to make the same land serve him for several years. So it's really more and more a concern at the AIC level.¹⁰⁴

These issues permeated the AIC's strategy for the development of the cotton sector. During the 2018 Fête du Cotonculteur in Banikoara, the main cotton-producing district of Benin, I witnessed the emphasis put on both fronts: intensification of production and adoption of conservation measures. On that occasion, farmers from all over the country came to the village's stadium, where national authorities, including the Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, and the President of the AIC, distributed awards to farmers and cooperatives. The event was filled with political messages of gratitude towards Patrice Talon and the AIC, alongside praises for the good efforts of each one of the cotton growers. The messages in support of the intensification programme flowed abundantly – nothing surprising for an event that is organised by the AIC. However, among the expected political acclamations, speakers and banners emphasised climate change and the sustainability of agricultural practices (see figure 15, left).

¹⁰³ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

¹⁰⁴ AIC#2, 09/07/2018.

Figure 15: The 2018 Cotton Grower Fair in Banikoara. On the left, the sign says: 'Acteurs de la filière ! Mobilisons-nous pour une agriculture durable par la promotion des mesures de gestion durable des terres, d'adaptation aux changements climatiques et une mécanisation adaptée'



The election of Patrice Talon, 'a connoisseur of the field', as many interviewees agreed, is not to be neglected. Some CRA-CF agronomists acknowledged that he changed his position towards cotton research once he became president. A major change for cotton research was the formalisation of the CRA-CF funding scheme through the revision of the finance bill, stating thereafter the AIC's contribution at 10 CFA francs per kilogram of cotton exported. Prior to that, Talon, as the main actor sitting at the AIC, was a fierce opponent of that arrangement, as a senior CRA-CF researcher explained:

before, he was against us... not because he didn't know the value of our work, but maybe he didn't want to invest in us and take our findings anyways. Now, he's changed his position. He knows what cotton research needs and he is the one who dictates now that every change needs to go through us. Now, it is not the businessman who speaks, it is the head of state... he will be accountable for the results of his work... if we say cotton research is in a good shape today, is because of him, not because of the AIC.¹⁰⁵

From the perspectives of the farmers I interviewed, the re-establishment of the AIC enabled the end of uncertainties related to the delivery of agrochemicals and the provision of food fertilisers, which in turn allowed them to increase their production of subsistence crops without compromising cotton outputs. With regards to rural extension services, the new organisation was still to be implemented by the time I concluded my field research. Amongst the main aspects of the reform, extension agents were sceptical towards the suppression of the CARDERs and the establishment of regional centres specialising in local crops, while advice related to cotton would remain the responsibility of AIC agents and other subcontracted agencies.

¹⁰⁵ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

Most of these changes cannot be connected to any development project, but the upsurge of initiatives in the 2000s contributed to mainstreaming concerns that some actors of the sector had shared for many years but that remained marginalised – especially relating to the introduction of conservation agriculture aspects in the main agricultural programme of the country. However, the adopted changes remained aligned with the historical objective of intensifying cotton production, which was introduced by the colonial power and has become the common objective of the government, researchers, and extension agents throughout the years. In the next section, I move to more subtle and invisible effects of projects that occur outside the explicit policy changes led by the cotton elite.

6.2.4. Subtle project footprints in transformed practices

Who is the main actor of the sector? I asked that question to farmers in the main cotton-producing regions and to a member of the farmer's organisation in Cotonou and got two different answers that illustrate farmers' naturalisation of domination. The organisation's member was a member of the technical staff based in Cotonou, responsible for coordinating and bringing together the claims of tens of farmer's organisations across the country. To that question, he replied proudly: 'honestly, the farmer'.¹⁰⁶ Although he replied with conviction, he expected me to be surprised – and I was. Not due to disagreeing with him, but until that moment I had heard different opinions from the most diverse actors. In Banikoara, the first cotton-producing district, I once met several cotton growers at the U-Com headquarters who had come to collect their boxes of agrochemicals. I asked the same question to a group of them who were sitting on their motorbikes under a tree waiting for their delivery. While the majority remained silent, a louder voice declared without hesitation: 'It's Patrice Talon!'. Everyone agreed and, in contrast to the Cotonou-based administrator, none of them thought about themselves.

Farmers are constantly told that their contribution to the cotton sector is minimal. I have also asked multiple cotton growers what the main problems of the cotton sector were, and why it was not so profitable for them. Before mentioning the cost of production related to inputs, various informants declared that it was their fault, because '[they] like rest too much... after the harvest [they] do not do anything, just stay there, waiting for the rain'.¹⁰⁷ In that same spirit, an AIC representative in the Alibori department blamed the farmers' 'laziness'

¹⁰⁶ ORGP#1, 19/04/2018.

¹⁰⁷ CF#7, 08/02/2018.

for the lack of impact of new technologies, while researchers and extension agents addressed farmers in the same terms when visiting their fields. This is the structure in which knowledge travels in prevailing institutions.

In addition, few are the spaces in which farmers can express their discontent. At the AIC, the claims coming from the villages hardly reach the meeting rooms where the price and quantity of agrochemicals are negotiated. Marginalised at the decision-making spaces, growers can express their demands in workshops that SODECO and the AIC organise in the field. In June 2018, I attended a session SODECO and the AIC jointly organised in Parakou to train cotton farmers and extension agents on new products and their correct application. The exchanges that followed the presentation depict the power relations among stakeholders, which determine the outcomes of conflicts of interest:

Farmer: Didn't the CRA-CF develop a variety so that we don't need these products anymore? They are too expensive for us.

SODECO: The CRA-CF seeks varieties with long fibres, but these are more sensitive... We cannot have it all!

AIC: The adoption of cultivars is decided by farmers and ginners. The CRA-CF test them at your fields. Researchers only validate a cultivar if the yields exceed 20 per cent compared to the previous ones. Then ginners look at the colour. If it is yellowish, the ginner does not want it... same if the fibre is not long.

Farmer: But can't we have a more productive cultivar? Like, if you mix two different cultivars...

SODECO: Don't you think the researchers thought about that?

In this context, marked by unequal power relations, projects create short-lived arrangements with different rules and arrangements that potentially challenge the prevailing power structures. This can take different forms, some of them very subtle. A project coordinator shared with me the experience a farmer had had after deciding to adopt direct seeding on mulch – a technique the farmer had learnt in a project activity and that could increase revenues in the medium term. In the cropping season that followed the training, the farmer decided not to follow the ITK and plough it, but to cover it with crop residues instead. The project coordinator explained what happened afterwards:

He had decided not to plough his field anymore, so that to allow some species to grow. He said that the neighbours, and even his own wife, were disappointed. She said: 'what? the people will see your field like that, poorly maintained... it's not good! You have to do like the others and clean your field so that you know that you are a good man.' Then he said to himself: 'what should be done?' He had to follow what was said to him as part of the project, leave the field like that, or should he do like everyone else, be

hardworking, go and get rid of everything? ... He hesitated a lot, but finally, he said 'no', that what he learnt at the project level should not be bad, he would leave it like that. But he was positively surprised when he went to see his plot... The roots came in well and the plants gave more cotton... he admitted he was lazy, but the results were there and people congratulated him now, saying that 'it's good, it's good'. It was not easy at first, because it was something new, but over time they realised that it was really good for them.¹⁰⁸

This farmer's experience demonstrates how deeply connected the idea of laziness is to farmers and how it might hinder innovations emerging from the bottom. However, in some projects, raising awareness and possibly creating disruption is part of the objective. A senior cotton grower in Banikoara praised training he had received from a project in which experts introduced cotton growers to basic accounting. This made them assess the real costs of production and profits.

There was a training that we called... PAFICOT... Yes, PAFICOT trained us... If the cotton gives very well, we can find up to 1.5 per hectare. If we subtract all the expenses, you will see that we, on the ground, we fall. But if it was not because of the training, I would not know that we were losing. For me, we eat as we want... and we forget what we spent. So because of this training, it helped us, ah!, if we could continue to have training like that... really! Many people would want to stop growing cotton!¹⁰⁹

In a conversation, another farmer argued that this kind of training is not part of the national extension service repertoire, which is under the AIC's supervision:

CF#7: The agents train us on which period we have to sow, put the fertiliser... all that. But the project, it is not about that, it more about our concerns, how to do the planning, things like that... in September we had a training that scared me a lot. Really. They said that the products that we use are not good for consumption. All the fertilisers and insecticides, all that, it's not good.

Me: But did they say you should stop using these products?

CF#7: Well, they said to stop putting it in the food crops... And not to use it near rivers or wells.

CF#8: It's going to kill the fish and the animals.

CF#7: And it might make us sick as well.

Me: It is the extension service who tells you what product you should use?

CF#7: Yes.

Me: And do you have a choice?

CF#7 Well, they bring it to us only, and they tell how to apply it. We don't have a say.

¹⁰⁸ IDP#7, 17/04/2018.

¹⁰⁹ CF#6, 07/02/2018.

At times, projects constitute the only channel through which the actors of the cotton sector have access to alternative knowledge and information that contradicts the logic of intensification promoted by the government and the cotton elite since colonial times. Therefore, the brokering between project and enduring institutions sometimes happens in very subtle and diffuse ways. A useful example of this diffuse brokering is when a project participant attended a workshop that provided a positive experience of a practice that they also execute in their everyday tasks. An elderly farmer whom I interviewed multiple times decided to leave the cotton sector during the debt crises of the 1990s. He learnt cotton farming with the French in the 1970s. He remembered the details of this experience, especially the distinct social interactions with project experts:

The foreigners they are more engaged. They come to the fields, they take notes, they listen to us. The Beninese they don't even bring a piece of paper... He can't remember everything we say here... it is not his problem if it is good or not good.¹¹⁰

Even though this experience was a long time ago and short-lived, he still draws from it to criticise the current rural extension services. Conversely, farmers who have never encountered trainers other than the CARDERs', have a different appreciation of the national service, pointing to other problems that relate more to logistics than to meta-practices:

Our relationship with trainers is very good, we cannot say it's not good... the problem is, it is necessary that they inform us early. Because they just called me for a training in N'Dali today... I was not aware, even the money for gas I do not have. So, if I knew before, I could go.¹¹¹

This difference of appreciation, between those who attended project activities and those who did not, came out frequently. Farmers who have experimented with something else, something different, had developed a critical opinion about the services they usually get.

At the level of extension agents, the pattern is the same, but they have more agency to shape social interactions because they are responsible for delivering training to farmers. One extension agent criticised the way he received training from his hierarchy and praised the way projects generally do it. He specifically mentioned the way national trainers intimidate the participants. By contrast, in project activities, trainer-trainee relations were more horizontal. From this experience, he was able to draw some ideas to replicate in his own practice:

If I want to conduct training, I warn them first, the day, the date, and the place. I'll arrive in advance to let them know that delay is not allowed at any

¹¹⁰ CF#1, 25/10/2017.

¹¹¹ CF#2, 10/11/2017.

time. So, when you start, you start, you make them understand that what you are saying is relevant. What you are giving them as training is relevant, that they are in need. Some people remain reluctant, others accept the rules right away.¹¹²

Similarly, a former agent who became a CRA-CF researcher shared with me how fond he became of participatory methods after his experience in the COMPACI project (2006–2010). In this activity, project managers elaborated the diagnostic based on consultation workshops they organised in the villages. He tried to bring the same practice to his everyday work, to the planning of the extension service, but faced some constraints:

In the training programme, I cannot get out of what came from the boss [in terms of content], but me, informally, in parallel, I had discussions with my team and sometimes with producers, to do what I thought was more participatory. Maybe it did not please them, I do not know, but that was quite informal, and nobody cared about that. Whether we do it or not, it was not important for the hierarchy. It did not regard anyone, because we did it around beers. And all that was rather friendly... it was not in the formal setting of the job... Well, we tried it, but it was not really the same thing... we were asked to prepare the budget, but in fact it was already decided from the top and then, well... we did not really have room for manoeuvre.¹¹³

Although ‘decisions from the top’ hindered the effects of the participatory methods he applied, his action, inspired by a project experience, illustrates a project footprint outside the project framework. This shows that non-elite actors, such as extension agents and farmers, draw on project experiences to change their own practice and are able to do so according to their agency outside project spaces. Hence, elites are not exclusively responsible for brokering project processes into prevailing institutions. Every actor, by acting in the sector, appears as a potential bricoleur, because changed practices shape the prevailing structures, but, in this case, in a more diffuse and less obvious way that are hardly noticed and that remain off the radar in project evaluations.

Conclusion

This chapter has described how the host context borrowed project components to use in prevailing institutions. Following the suggestion of a key informant, I decided to analyse the perpetuation of project arrangements in the host context in two different periods. This distinction was based not on the nature of projects, but on the configurations of the host institutional setting.

¹¹² MAEP#4, 09/02/2018.

¹¹³ INRAB#8, 09/05/2018.

Projects played a determining role in building the cotton sector in Benin as an organised industry and export crop. It was not the impact of one single project, but the combined effect of various interventions in the long term that gave continuity to the colonial project of intensifying and increasing cotton production in Dahomey. Earlier projects occupied a dominant position in the cotton sector when they introduced arrangements that were essential for the intensification of and increases in production. These arrangements prevailed as the rule for subsequent transformations. For example, the first cotton project established the cotton-exclusive input credit system which made almost every farmer a cotton farmer and remained an indisputable element of the sector. In that same vein, World Bank projects consolidated the use of agrochemicals in cotton farming, suppressing by these means the low-intensity cotton farming techniques that existed before. Similarly, the processes that PARAB and PARCOB introduced in the cotton research domain also prevailed because of the inescapable need to have a plant breeding programme in such a competitive industry. These were the changes required to build the industry and make cotton an export crop.

Later projects, in contrast, found in the host context consolidated institutions, in which their arrangements needed to fit in order to prevail. Projects no longer occupied a dominant position in the field and were unable to change established practices. For example, the arrangements, relationships, processes, and practices that PADSE introduced did not fit in the prevailing rules of the host context, hence they did not prevail. The project went against the long-term trend of increasing the use of agrochemicals and, thereby, against the interests of major actors of the sector. In addition, the project stood alone against the consolidated institutions in the host context and its arrangements were marginalised in the field as a consequence. This situation changed with the boom of projects and partners from 2004 onwards. The multiplication of projects in the cotton sector gave projects a combined weight in the field. While the increase in initiatives made the analysis of project footprints more difficult, the reforms that have taken place since 2016 reflect elements coming from many projects from that period. By exploring the changes at the individual level, it was possible to observe changes in practices inspired by project experiences. These small-scale, subtle, and often invisible changes also constitute pathways from ad hoc to durable.

CHAPTER 7. BETWEEN CHANGE AND CONTINUITY: THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN PROJECT AND HOST CONTEXT THROUGH TIME

Development projects consistently appear in the history of the cotton sector in Benin. Because of their constant presence, the components that projects introduced in the host context have regularised arrangements, relationships, and practices, creating an institution that became part of the enduring institutional ecology in which host actors navigate. As the process of institutional bricolage suggests, actors borrow components from different institutional settings, then piece them together to respond to everyday challenges according to the agency they have outside projects. Within this framework, I have followed project pieces as host actors use them when acting within the enduring institutions of the host context. In chapter 4, I started by locating project pieces in the life trajectories of the different categories of bricoleurs and distinguishing them from the other pieces available in the host context. The distinct features of a project piece come from the innate characteristics of projects, which are their resources and rules, alien to the context, and the short temporality and exclusiveness of interventions. Such characteristics appear as constraints that hinder the ability of a single project to structurally change enduring institutions. However, as I showed in chapters 5 and 6, projects do contribute to incremental changes in the host context, as host actors, at different scales, unpack project components and re-use pieces in enduring institutional settings, such as subsequent projects, and in prevailing institutions. At this point in my journey, I do not pretend to fully understand what shapes my own practice, but a historical examination of cotton development cooperation in Benin has contributed to resituating isolated encounters within a composite trajectory. In this chapter, I assemble the pieces as I insert the project into a historical trajectory.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, I analyse the changes in the distribution of power within project ad hoc institutions as a way of analysing their ability to influence the prevailing context. Then, I discuss the evolution of the interplay between projects and the host context, as projects have seen their position in the field gradually going from the centre to the periphery. Finally, I conclude this section by examining the continuation of unequal power relations despite changes in the hierarchy of the cotton sector and the different roles that projects have played in this process.

7.1. The growing agency of hosts within projects

The examination of the trajectory of cotton projects in Benin brings to light the changes in development paradigms and practice and the consequent transformation in the distribution

of power within cotton projects. As many other development projects in the 1960s, the first cotton projects were a straightforward continuation of the colonial enterprise (Pacquement, 2010). Consequently, colonial relations structured the international development field with the dominant and subaltern positions of coloniser and colonised transformed into the donor-recipient dichotomy. In this structure, the cotton sector remained dependent on donors' resources, creating a pattern of dependence on foreign support, as the decrease in cotton production in the absence of project support and the appearance of the saying 'no project, no job' illustrate so well (Mongbo and Dossou-Houessou, 2000). Consequently, development practices of later projects tended to reproduce this pattern, because, as suggested by Bourdieu's theory of practice and considered in the institutional bricolage concept, early experiences have particular weight in shaping subsequent actions.

This is not to imply that the project experience became immune to change. As I have discussed above, the criticisms of development assistance fostered changes in development paradigm and practice in such way that a project from the 1960s is very different from what we see today. Early development projects were criticised for inserting recipient countries into a linear development path that did not necessarily correspond to their characteristics or did not match the enduring possibilities and constraints of the host context. In this patronising way, the project – and development – was presented as an improvement, a step towards progress and modernisation, while discarding other histories, perspectives, and possible futures.

Over time, the criticisms of those linear trajectories of development and hierarchical relations between projects and context were incorporated into project documents and strategies of implementation to encapsulate more constituting elements of the host country. For example, the World Bank interventions of the 1980s in the cotton sector in Benin integrated topics such as gender, community-based development, and the environment in their project documents. From the 1990s, projects moved the focus of the initiatives in the rural sector from state-led initiatives to themes such as poverty alleviation, sustainable livelihoods, gender equity, and good governance (Ellis and Biggs, 2001). This last move implied that project support would go directly to the private sector, farmers' organisations, and ginning operators, instead of public entities, in a period of structural adjustments and retreat of the state.

Yet those initiatives did not completely modify the structured positions in the cotton development assistance field, settled in its origins. These new pieces were incorporated into the project institutional setting but the objective of intensifying cotton production via the

eradication of traditional cotton farming systems persisted. This suggests that the hierarchical positions between recipients and donor knowledge, practices, and plans remained predominantly unchanged. Projects still claimed to propose the way out of poverty and kept the host context dependent on them by providing the necessary resources to make the cotton sector function. It was only that the receiver end changed from the state apparatus to the private sector, as the development agenda of the nineties suggested. In other words, there was a change in the recipient side, but the unequal power relations between the dominant and subaltern positions in the development cooperation field continued.

Projects continued to be a recurring element in the cotton sector throughout the years. The repeated introduction of temporary arrangements made projects an enduring institution of the host context. In this process, host actors, across different categories, developed a sort of pragmatic engagement with projects. The use of project resources and outcomes – in this case, the cotton sector itself – to fund neo-patrimonial networks motivated the projectivisation of cotton assistance, as large programmes gave place to shorter and more specific interventions. The fragmentation of aid in smaller projects enabled the donor community to maintain structured subaltern positions in the international development field and keep the project space under their apparent control.

Later changes in ad hoc arrangements continued to be donor-driven. Later projects introduced new management tools with participatory mechanisms, improved accountability and transparency, and started to overtly challenge what had become conventional cotton farming that earlier projects extensively contributed to establishing. The agricultural sector continued to be a privileged host of participatory mechanisms (Moumouni et al., 2013). The resulting experiences within project spaces marked the life trajectories of host actors. For example, one cotton researcher particularly appreciated the diagnostic a project conducted before beginning activities, which contrasted with what he had seen before both within and outside projects. Additionally, he had been involved in planning and strategic meetings that he considered participatory:

There were 30 to 40 people... there were farmers, the GIZ, some NGO representatives, mainly the people from the steering committee... But we called everyone... there were people from the field, like me, so they tried to have representation from all levels.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ INRAB#8, 22/05/2018.

Further on, he acknowledged that ‘not all of them had the same weight in decision making though’. Indeed, projects did change their methodology and practice, but mainly to reassert their own relevance, similar to what Li (2007) observed when studying development interventions in Indonesia, a sort of contractual participation (Biggs, 1989), in which project leaders control decision-making power. At the same time, projects did not challenge their own purpose, as they continued to pretend to provide overestimated solutions for structural problems and to play the role of provider of resources to the host context (as Moumouni et al., 2013 also found). In this sense, it seemed that both donor and recipient were content with the status quo. On one side, projects provided the participating hosts, from cotton researchers to farmers, necessary resources that they could use to their own benefit; on the other, cotton projects enabled donors to compensate the continuation of cotton subsidies in their own countries while new implementation methodologies gave them legitimacy in emerging aid paradigms.

The arrival of Southern cotton projects in this consolidated structure was promising as a trigger of change, because of the emphasis SSC discourse put on horizontal relationships, mutual benefits, and equality between host and provider. However, the introduction of a different development cooperation paradigm by Southern providers implied an encounter and conflict with practices that had become self-evident and were taken for granted, and thereby formed traditions in the field. This encounter brought to light the weight of traditional aid’s regularised practices in the development cooperation field. For instance, the main element of rupture that research participants perceived with Southern projects was the different level of financial support, which resulted in different arrangements and relationships between hosts and providers. While Southern providers introduced these new arrangements and practices, host actors replicated traditional patterns within SSC cotton projects, with no different expectations than they would have in a Northern project. This implies that host actors drew from past experiences in traditional aid projects when acting within Southern cotton projects. This mismatch of practices affected project processes and outcomes, as I explored in chapter 5. The practice that resulted is something between traditional aid and SSC.

The study of the encounter between SSC and traditional aid practices also brings to light the agency that certain categories of host actors gained within projects, in contrast with the first cotton projects. In this sense, a statement from an experienced cotton researcher is illuminating:

Normally a project that comes to Benin, or anywhere, will have to have a partner on the ground, a sustainable structure, which is really the cement, which is really the support for this project there. Simply because, when a structure is well-established behind the project, this structure can perpetuate, capitalise information and data. It is also necessary that these structures have a minimum of means to be also able to assist this project when this project is in difficulty during its implementation. It is necessary that the structure has the means to fill the gaps of the projects during its period of implementation.¹¹⁵

Note that the interviewee's perspective contrasts with the purpose of development projects and mentality of many project managers: the host supports the project, and not the other way round. This is also very different from earlier cotton project logic, when the cotton sector depended solely on project support and resources, and projects were able to impose a farming system on the whole country and host actors were unable to challenge it. Hosts still need projects to carry on their activities, but to a lesser extent.

However, the changes in the agency of host actors within projects is better explained by changes in the other fields of the host context than by changes in the paradigms of aid and development cooperation. When the informant above shared his perspective, he did so based on the recent fiscal bill sponsored by Talon and approved by the National Assembly that gives more resources to cotton research, specifically a tax of XOF 10 for each kilogram of cotton exported (Government of Benin, 2016). He felt empowered outside project spaces, and likewise within projects. This indicates that changes in development cooperation practice and ad hoc institutions, in contrast to changes in paradigms, depend more on the host context than on the donors and providers' agenda. In the next section, I discuss the changing role of projects in the transformation of the host context.

7.2. The decreasing weight of cotton projects in the host context

The interplay between projects and host context did not follow a single pattern from 1960 to 2018. There were periods when projects were at the centre of the field, and others when they were at the periphery. In the first years of cotton development assistance, projects gave continuation to the colonial plan of intensifying cotton production and thus occupied a dominant position. Indeed, the objectives of earlier projects were unequivocal: to make Benin a supplier of a commodity to the former coloniser's industry. Therefore, projects contributed to creating the structure of the cotton sector, in the sense that they provided the

¹¹⁵ INRAB#7, 02/08/2018.

necessary rules and resources to industrialise cotton production. France and World Bank projects imposed arrangements and practices as prevailing institutions, to the detriment of traditional practices and meanings related to cotton production in Dahomey. In a context still marked by colonial relations in spite of independence, hosts actors had limited agency to shape the cotton sector and occupied a subaltern position both in the cotton sector and in the cotton development cooperation field.

The gradual increase in the agency of hosts actors in the cotton sector is tied to the transformations of the Beninese postcolonial state. The cotton sector was a secondary object of struggle for the political elites of the 1960s, probably because of the constant political instability that marked the first decade after independence. In this sense, Kérékou's coup d'état was a rupture as it brought political stability and the possibility to adopt a national social and economic programme (Allen, 1992a; Ayo, 1984; Genné, 1978). It was also an attempt to break with the former colonial power. The political consolidation of the postcolonial state allowed the government to take over the cotton sector from the World Bank and France and to impose its own rules and arrangements. This new configuration in the field, with the state occupying the dominant position, gave cotton a different meaning, putting the development of the sector on a path that diverged from the intensification of production that had prevailed hitherto. As a result, without specific incentives, cotton became a less important objective for farmers and the pace of intensification faded as farmers turned to food crops, which were prioritised by the regime's agricultural policy (Fok, 2010; Kpadé and Boinon, 2011). This demonstrates the importance of projects in that stage of the development of the cotton sector.

However, this ended up being a short episode. In Cotonou, Kérékou faced a wave of protests against the single party structure, fostered by economic distress. The regime needed more resources to co-opt allies and help the postcolonial pact endure (Banégas, 2003). In this context, the regime reconsidered the nationalisation of the economy and re-established relations with France and the World Bank, including on intervention in the cotton sector. Thus, because of political and economic crises in other fields, the government looked back at the cotton sector as a source of revenue. In this process, projects again came to play a dominant role.

In the 1980s, projects made cotton an economic asset for the state, which incorporated it as a source of income to sustain the postcolonial pact between elites, the 'politics of the belly' (Banégas, 1998; Bayart, 1993). This process of appropriation of the cotton sector is similar

to the re-appropriation of the institutions of colonial origin that built African states (Bayart, 1993). As Mbembe (2001) suggests, not only did the state adopt the forms, but also the colonial rationality of domination, combined with pre-colonial elements. Thus, similar to the construction of the state, the governance of the cotton sector was transformed as it was inserted into the political economy of Benin, acquiring new meanings and diverging from the rational industry that projects aimed to build.

The agency of projects in the cotton sector started to fade as Beninese society embedded cotton and gave it its own meaning – in the case of the state, the support of the state apparatus and of the postcolonial pact. The relationship of farmers to cotton exemplifies this appropriation as well, but from below. Cotton farming never became a profitable business as projects promoted, but earlier projects created a system in which farmers became dependent on cotton agricultural inputs that they could use to grow other crops – and on cotton earnings, to spend on ceremonies and material possessions (Nansounon, 2012). Mongbo (1995, p.147) goes further and argues that cotton has become the social good that connects the village to the state apparatus thereby structuring peasant-state relationships. Therefore, farmers also gave their own meaning to cotton (entry point for inputs and yearly source of cash) that diverged from the expected emergence of an agri-business rationality that projects intended to develop in Benin – an outcome that Olivier de Sardan (1988, p.222) explains by the distinction between peasant and project logics, as farmers use project provisions in a way which does not correspond to the aims of projects.

During the 1980s, cotton was consolidated in the national interest, while the position of projects in the field became less central – but earlier experiences under the rule of projects had left their mark. Although projects no longer structured the field, the prevailing institutions persisted while adapting the arrangements and practices that earlier dominant projects had introduced. The appropriation of the cotton sector as an object of struggle by host actors entailed a progressive differentiation between project and cotton sector institutional components. Certainly, project resources continued to flow to the public companies that came to occupy the dominant position in the cotton sector, such as SONAPRA and the CARDERs, but the cotton sector structure endured without projects. Questions regarding this were raised by the World Bank evaluators at the end of the Second Borgou project (1988–1993), because they feared that the CARDERs would not be able to run with the low resources of the government and in the emerging context of liberalisation (World Bank, 1994). As we have seen throughout this thesis, the CARDERs continued to run, but not necessarily on the same terms as under the project's framework because of the

lesser resources available from the government in the absence of project support. The example of the plant breeding programme at the CRA-CF, a few years later, also demonstrates the incorporation, adaptation, and transformation of project elements beyond project time frames.

It was in a context in which hosts acquired agency and transformed the meanings of the cotton sector that the liberalisation process started. This process cannot be disentangled from the democratic transition, although very little has changed in terms of state functioning and elite coalitions. In fact, as Banégas (2003) shows, it was precisely to ensure the continuity of the postcolonial pact between the elites that the democratic transition was made necessary. Cotton was one of the fields to be controlled by both old and emerging elites. Therefore, it is in a very different host context that later projects intervened compared to the first waves of interventions.

In the 1990s the cotton sector had become an autonomous social, economic, and political machine. Among host actors, the arrival of private companies reshuffled the positions in the field. Struggles between public and private companies, with repeated alliances and ruptures, emerged for the control of the cotton sector. As an extension agent suggested, ‘cotton became a dense network where everybody wants to eat, because it’s there where the money is. But it is also there where problems are’.¹¹⁶ At the level of farmers, if they were practically coerced to grow cotton in the 1960s, even the debt crises of the 1990s did not encourage them to quit the sector permanently. The consistency of incentives and the lack of opportunities to acquire cash in any other sector contributed to bringing back farmers to the cotton sector after the crises. Notwithstanding the reasons, cotton was the indisputable cash crop, especially in the northern departments. At the centre of the field, the institutional crises of the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, with the successive suppressions and reestablishment of the AIC, illustrate the moments of cleavage and alignment of elite interests. In 2016, the election of Patrice Talon, the king of cotton, and the stability his government brought to the sector, epitomise the dependence of the cotton sector on national politics rather than on projects.

Against this background, from the 1990s on, development projects found a host context with regularised practices that they aimed to transform – and not create or govern. The obstacles that PADSE (1998–2005) found to changing consolidated practices exemplify the rigidity of the cotton sector’s structure and the inability of projects to change it. PADSE was

¹¹⁶ MAEP#7, 21/11/2017.

also the first project that went against the logic of constantly increasing the use of agrochemicals that had characterised earlier projects and the cotton sector structure. Thus, the project was a rupture with earlier project practices, in addition to going against the interests of the emerging national cotton elite. As such, the project's arrangements were too different and divergent to be completely incorporated as official practice, and the techniques shared remained marginalised.

Interestingly, while the weight of projects dwindled and their scope narrowed, their number increased. Projects still populated the cotton sector, but their role went from dominant to peripheral. The example of COMPACI (2009–2012) shows the restricted weight of projects. The project aimed to promote the production of sustainable cotton under the label 'Cotton made in Africa' (CmiA), which restricts child labour in the fields, among other constraints, and provides higher remuneration to farmers. Such standards of cotton production contrasted with the prevailing practices in the cotton sector. Farmers and extension agents hired by the project admitted that farmers did not comply with the rules all the time. To avoid sanctions and keep the project running, they would make tours before the official missions to ensure that the evaluators would not find any children in the fields and that everything was under control.¹¹⁷ This means that the project succeeded in changing farming practices, but only within project spaces, which did not prevail once the project ended. As another sign of the decreasing weight of projects in the host context, the institutional crisis between the state and the AIC in 2012 induced the CmiA to suspend Benin's accreditation, anticipating the end of the project.

While the agency of hosts within projects increased and the weight of projects within the cotton sector decreased, the incorporation of ad hoc arrangements into the host context remained an authoritative process.

7.3. The constant factor: The continuity of unequal power relations in the governance of the cotton sector

In the discussion above, we have seen that the power relations within projects and between projects and the host context went through different configurations throughout the years and affected the way in which ad hoc institutional arrangements endured. This is to say, in regards to the research question, that there is no one way through which host actors

¹¹⁷ INRAB#8, 22/05/2018.

incorporated ad hoc components into prevailing institutions. It is a dynamic process. However, there is one element that seems to be a constant factor in the history of the project-context interplay in the cotton sector in Benin: the incorporation of ad hoc elements into enduring arrangements is an authoritative process.

It is possible to distinguish two main phases in the history of the interplay between projects and host context: the first is characterised by the dominance of project arrangements over hosting structures, and the second is where the positions shifted, with the host context dominating project experiences. Additionally, there are two domains in the enduring institutions of the host context to be analysed: ad hoc institutions, observed in the recurrence of projects, and prevailing institutions.

In the first period, it is important to recall that colonialism is at the root of the building of the cotton sector. The French colonial administration enforced the transformation of cotton production to respond to the interests of the metropole (Labouret, 1928; Levrat, 2008, 2009; Manning, 2004). Therefore, this was an authoritative process, carved within colonial relations of power. After independence, the former coloniser framed this colonial plan within cotton projects to enforce the rules for cotton production. While national political forces fought for the control of the state in the 1960s, the first cotton project multiplied production through incentives and by limiting the opportunities of farmers to access credit and cash in other sectors.

In this process, the introduction of rules and resources to enable and constrain action created a new set of practices in the host context. Therefore, in the early years of the cotton sector, project institutions prevailed. They enabled a certain kind of agricultural practice, creating new norms while constraining traditional methods. For example, projects introduced new varieties of cotton and animal-traction for ploughing, and promoted the use of agrochemicals. This entailed the complete reorganisation of the institutions of the rural sector and the suppression of old arrangements in order to put in place a system that revolved exclusively around cotton (Mongbo and Dossou-Houessou, 2000; Nansounon, 2012). At this point, the ad hoc institutions of projects constituted the prevailing institutions. The host context incorporated such arrangements by coercion and the only moment of resistance was the few years under Kérékou when cotton returned to being a secondary object of struggle for the state and farmers alike.

Political instability arising from economic distress drove Kérékou to reconsider placing cotton as a primary economic asset. From that moment, at the beginning of the 1980s, the

government embarked on the cotton development path that colonial France had envisaged decades earlier. World Bank rural development projects were essential in this process. These projects provided all the pieces that allowed Benin to continue to produce and export seed cotton to world textile industries. They built ginneries and funded the national companies that promoted the use of agrochemicals, and supervised collection, processing, and marketing. The incentives were also back, with the payment of bonifications to extension agents and the insurance of price stability thanks to project resources. These projects made cotton a consolidated economic asset. Indeed, while projects structured the cotton sector, the national elite incorporated cotton as a source of income that perpetuated state politics of extraversion, funded clientelistic networks, and provided stability to the postcolonial state. As a result, production increased considerably and intensive cotton production in Benin reached a point of no return.

The liberalisation of the cotton sector is a milestone in the trajectory of the cotton sector and of projects alike. First, this process strengthened the conflicting perspectives of France and the World Bank on the sector. France's strategy was to pursue an integrated approach, with one national company overseeing the whole sector, while the World Bank pushed for the fragmentation of activities to increase competitiveness. The second option prevailed as Benin, in financial distress, started to negotiate Structural Adjustment Plans as early as the mid-1980s. Development projects continued to support the cotton sector through liberalisation, but it was no longer a question of building the sector but of maintaining it and of ensuring the transition towards a competitive system. At the national level, the cotton sector became the object of struggle between private and state elites, as the liberalisation process transferred the activities from public to private companies. Therefore, the functioning of the cotton sector was no longer dependent on external funding, but on the stability of alliances between the national public and private elites.

This point marks the transition from a period in which projects were dominant to the second period, in which they have become peripheral experiences in the host context. It also marks the gradual differentiation between project and prevailing arrangements, as the former no longer prevailed in the cotton sector.

Against this background, the power over the cotton sector went from the coloniser to projects, then from projects to the postcolonial state, characterised by the straddling between state and private sector (Banégas, 1998, 2003; Bayart, 1993; Mbembe, 1992, 1999, 2001). But power relations within the cotton sector remained, in spite of the transitions in the dominant

positions of the field. Farmers especially, but also rural extension agents and cotton researchers, remained at the periphery as the postcolonial state perpetuated the modes of governance established in the cotton sector since its inception during colonial times. As an illustration, the recent concentration of power around Talon and his companies strangely mirrors the integrated system that France promoted during and after the colonial era. An extension agent and a cotton researcher summarised the nature of current relationships briefly when I asked about their room for manoeuvre in their everyday activities, respectively: ‘the innovations are always acquired through the hierarchy... The hierarchy informs us via [cotton] research, they give us the notions, then we share with farmers’;¹¹⁸ ‘because I work for the State, the boss has to decide, and they sent us their decisions’.¹¹⁹ Hierarchical relationships trickle down to farmers, who were called ‘lazy’ by researchers, extension agents, and themselves.¹²⁰

In this context, shaped by arrangements introduced by early projects, later projects had less capacity to shape prevailing arrangements. As the life trajectories in chapter 4 show, projects became more intermittent and isolated events that contrasted with everyday activities for most of the groups of actors. While the first cotton projects intervened in all activities of the cotton sector (rural extension, ginning, marketing, input supply, and financial solvability), later projects, after liberalisation, focussed mainly on agricultural practices and institutional support to the AIC and farmers’ cooperatives. As a result, projects acquired different weight in the life trajectories of the different groups of actors. For example, throughout the chapters above, one can note that all groups of actors mention the importance of France and the World Bank’s projects of the 1980s, but the links to later projects are stronger within specific groups, mainly cotton researchers (because of the focus on agronomy) and secondarily with heads of farmers’ cooperatives, extension agents, and farmers. But projects worked much less with the AIC, ginners, and input suppliers.

This happened while the donor community made efforts to change the project experience and to bridge the gap with the host context. Later projects also attempted to address the unequal power relations of the cotton sector through the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices that could empower farmers and rural workers. From the mid-1990s, some interventions diverged from the ‘all for intensification of production’ development

¹¹⁸ MAEP#3, 07/02/2018.

¹¹⁹ INRAB#8, 22/05/2018.

¹²⁰ CF7# and CF#8, 08/02/2018; field observations with rural workers.

path. The post-2004 cotton projects illustrate this kind of experience. As I describe in chapters 5 and 6, these projects introduced conservation agriculture practices, and some of them participatory mechanisms, that were more aligned with the interests of farmers than of the cotton elite. These projects also worked more directly with farmers and researchers, bypassing the control of the state and of private companies over the dissemination of agricultural techniques. That period also saw the arrival of Southern providers, bringing to this context the SSC principle of horizontal relationships based on the context-similarity claim. However, these initiatives remained marginalised against the powerful conventional cotton system and the introduction of SSC principles in development cooperation practice brought to light the consolidation of traditional practices in the host context.

Nonetheless, cotton projects, Southern and Northern alike, remained welcome experiences from which host actors, including the powerless, in different ways, could draw to change their everyday practice. As such, we have seen that some conservation agriculture practices shared by a variety of projects started to permeate the AIC's strategy, now focussing on soil depletion, climate change adaptation, and integrated pest management. At the periphery of the cotton sector, some farmers were able to adopt aspects of conservation agriculture techniques, while extension agents attempted to reproduce in their everyday activities participatory processes that they had experienced within projects, as described in chapter 6. From this perspective, the multiplication of initiatives sharing divergent arrangements, relationships, processes, and practices is welcome. These changes in the prevailing arrangements, relationships, and practices show that the combined impact of multiple initiatives might compensate for the inability of a single intervention to have an impact. In other words, it appears that the agency of a single project in the cotton sector decreased throughout time, but that development cooperation, as an ensemble, can still have a weight in the incremental change of the host context. I summarise these two different periods in the table below.

Table 7: The project-context interplay through periods and domains of action

	Prevailing institutions	Ad hoc institutions
1960–1980s Projects > host context	<p>In this period, projects imposed their arrangements, which covered all aspects of cotton production, as prevailing institutions.</p> <p>The cotton sector is marked by the generalisation of project practices to the detriment of traditional ones and focusses on the intensification of the production.</p>	
1980s–2018 Host context > project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of the arrangements introduced during the first period • Incorporation of cotton as an object of struggle for the national elites • Straddling between private and public national elites • Concentration of the gains with the emergence of a monopsony and monopoly while farmers remain marginalised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects become shorter and more specific • More diverse arrangements, including participatory mechanisms, SSC, and introduction of new themes • Multiplication of partners • Some initiatives diverged from the intensification model

Conclusion

The longitudinal examination of cotton projects in this chapter shows that the role that projects have played in the constitution of the cotton sector in Benin, getting ad hoc arrangements to become durable, has varied through time, as both project and host context have constantly changed. These changes have shaped the conditions under which host actors, at different degrees and differently across periods, assembled project pieces to respond to everyday challenges through institutional bricolage.

At first, projects were the main driver of the constitution of the cotton sector and occupied a dominant position in the field. In this configuration, the pieces that projects introduced were the main institutional arrangements available for the bricoleurs. Progressively, while the weight of projects diminished and host actors appropriated themselves the institutional arrangements introduced earlier, the positions in the cotton sector shifted. The post-colonial state and an emerging private sector moved to the centre of the field, while the dominance of the donor community was constrained within project spaces which did not coincide with the overall sector anymore. However, while the conditions under which the host context

incorporated project arrangements into enduring institutions has varied, it has remained largely shaped by unequal power relations between the centre and the periphery of the cotton sector and within project spaces, between implementers and hosts, throughout the periods. In the next chapter I conclude by reframing the discussion above around the concept of institutional bricolage.

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION: FROM AD HOC TO DURABLE THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL BRICOLAGE

At the beginning of my learning journey, I was motivated to deepen my understanding about my own practice. I felt that projects and the social interactions I had within them often led to unpredictable outcomes. This meant that there were elements shaping these encounters that I was not aware of. Such insecurities regarding the role and weight of development cooperation have fostered debates that revolved around whether and why projects, as the main instrument of development cooperation, work or not. While this debate generated new paradigms, from old and new providers, development anthropologists started to look at how and for whom projects work. This question resituated the importance of the enduring institutions of the host context in shaping the temporary and specific arrangements of projects and whatever happened after the period of implementation, outside project spaces and times. I situate my research between the overemphasised focus on projects and the neglect of project experiences. I focussed my research on the cotton sector in Benin, from the time of independence, in 1960, to 2018.

This thesis has examined how the host context comes to incorporate project arrangements, relationships, processes, and practices (that I call ‘project components’) into prevailing institutional arrangements. Such process I described as the way from ad hoc to durable. Institutional bricolage provided the framework through which I set out to answer my research question. In this chapter, I sum-up my findings around this concept before I reflect on what I have learnt from this journey.

8.1. Performing institutional bricolage with project pieces

The implementation of cotton projects represented the introduction of new institutional arrangements in the repertoire of institutions available in Benin. From that moment, host actors started to borrow pieces from projects in addition to the other institutional components that were already available in the host context. During the first cotton projects, the coercive introduction of new pieces involved the suppression of old arrangements. Farmers received incentive to change their cotton farming practices, mostly low-intense hitherto, and projects introduced institutional arrangements that overtook the previous consolidated institutions. Consequently, project components became the main pieces available for institutional bricolage in the cotton sector, and France and the World Bank the main bricoleurs. Thus, the former colonial power placed Dahomey on a development path

that the postcolonial state gradually made its own, by giving new meaning to cotton: it became the source of cash for farmers and the export crop for the state.

From this situation, institutional bricolage continued to build and transform the structure of the cotton sector, as host actors, across different categories at different levels and scales, continued to piece together arrangements they gathered from multiple sources, predominantly projects. Progressively, the development of the cotton sector became the interest of host actors, who incorporated and adapted the arrangements previously introduced but continued to depend on project arrangements in their repertoire. However, as host actors gave their own meaning to the sector, they shaped the institutions accordingly, while the weight of cotton projects diminished due to their fragmentation, intermittence and increasingly detachment from the enduring context. As a result, the cotton sector became an institution, or an ensemble of pieces, that donors had not expected. Indeed, donors considered that hosts were misusing project components to their own interest, outside the sector. The resulting patchwork ended up being different from the initial plan of building an economic sub-sector in the shape of companies in industrialised countries. Instead, the ensemble of pieces that had built the cotton sector was transformed in the process of incorporation into the host context to respond to the interests of those who had the ability to shape prevailing institutions – in a process similar to what De Koning (2011, p.215) defines as ‘aggregation’, where, in the process of institutional bricolage, external arrangements are adopted and combined with local institutions, resulting in a relatively balanced situation. Consequently, the cotton sector also tended to reproduce initial arrangements that, as we have seen, were based upon unequal power relations between coloniser and colonised, then perpetuated between donors and recipients, and later between the national elite and rural workers.

Pieces coming from later projects had to fit in with the existing composition, sharing broader meanings that earlier projects created and host actors re-interpreted. At this stage, the conditions of undertaking institutional bricolage were different from early experiences. Additionally, donors changed their project strategy. Instead of large development programmes, smaller interventions became the rule. This gave more room for manoeuvre for bricoleurs outside project spaces but allowed donors to keep the project experience under their control. From the host perspective, projects represented a source of institutional components from which they could borrow. The difference with earlier projects was that now the cotton sector had been appropriated by the hosts and shaped subsequent institutional bricolage.

Within a different host context and under a changing development cooperation paradigm, institutional bricolage with development cooperation arrangements became more complex. The number of stakeholders increased with liberalisation, increasing the competition for control over sector resources. At first, liberalisation redistributed the power among the elite, namely the input suppliers, ginners, and the state, creating disruptions in the functioning of the sector. In this struggle, project pieces became part of the resources at stake and were diverted to other purposes, outside the cotton sector, corroborating the idea that institutional arrangements are multipurpose and can be re-interpreted and re-used in other institutional settings (Cleaver, 2001, 2012; Huggins and Mastaki, 2020). Adjusting to the context configuration and emerging paradigms, donors directed their support to local interventions, at the level of farmers and extension agents. As they diverged from the national elites' interests, the project pieces became marginalised in the national repertoire of institutional arrangements, as the main policy reform of the cotton sector in 2009 elaborated without donors' intervention, demonstrates. The contribution of projects was therefore constrained in project spaces and temporality, rural workers were unable to shape prevailing institutions by adopting project practices, as the example of PADSE demonstrates.

The situation changed from 2004 with the multiplication of providers and projects. Project institutional arrangements flowed into the host context, replenishing the repertoires of the host context. More pieces and more diverse pieces became available to host actors to combine and apply to their everyday challenges in innovative ways. Such innovations remained dependent on the taken-for-granted rules, meanings, and power relations, as key elements that shape institutional bricolage. With regards to meanings and traditions, the introduction of SSC pieces, shaped and introduced in a different way, demonstrated the weight of past experiences on shaping subsequent practices. The arrangements that Southern partners introduced diverted from the routine and went through a process of resistance and re-shaping to fit within the consolidated practices.

Alongside meanings and taken-for-granted rules, the power relations in the cotton sector shaped the process of institutional bricolage with projects pieces outside project spaces – or, in other words, the way from ad hoc to durable, as suggested in section 2.1.4. There are two domains and scales of analysis in which I analysed the role of power in shaping institutional bricolage: the power relations between projects and the host context, and the power structure of the cotton sector. As discussed in chapter 7, the power relations between projects and host context, at a macro level of analysis, changed throughout the period studied. Projects went from the dominant to the peripheral position and host institutions from the periphery

to the centre. Such changes indicate that institutional bricolage in the cotton sector reflected the interests of the donor community, first, then, later, that of the host institutions. Among the host actors of the cotton sector, and now moving to a micro scale of analysis, institutional bricolage remained shaped by the dominant actors of the field, be it projects, in the earlier years, or public and national institutions, later on. Therefore, the change of dominant position in the field, from projects to host actors, did not lead to a more balanced power structure in the cotton sector, as rural workers remained powerless within it. Yet the introduction of more pieces and through different channels by the multiplication of projects implied more possible ways from ad hoc to durable through institutional bricolage. By adopting a relational approach of power, this research also demonstrated that some powerless actors in the cotton sector might have enough agency to shape institutional bricolage at a micro level. This was observed in the action of rural workers who borrowed project arrangements when organising training or when assembling pieces using project practices when sowing their fields. At the national level, project components were also incorporated. This is an outcome of the multiplication of project pieces available, but mainly stems from the stability brought to the sector by the conjunction of private and public interests following the election of Patrice Talon in 2016.

To conclude and to address my research question, the host context came to incorporate project institutional arrangements by combining new and old institutional components, creating meanings and traditions that determined subsequent arrangements, relationships, processes, and practices in the cotton sector. Over time, this process remained authoritative, top-down, because it was shaped by the unequal power relations that governed both the cotton sector and the interplay between projects and host context. These power relations also changed over time, transforming the role of development cooperation and its ability to change the host context. The historical perspective of institutional bricolage with project pieces shows that this process is neither linear nor radical. It is a gradual and slow process to which development cooperation contributes at different levels, at different moments, so that the effects of development projects cannot be generalised or anticipated. In conclusion, this research shows that the way projects work depends on their place in the history of the interplay between project and host context. It thus contributes to our understanding of how projects work in a certain way and in a particular moment in time.

8.2. What I am taking from this encounter

I began this research from the position of a project manager. I saw the host context through the lenses of projects, and the realisation of their limitations motivated me to approach projects from different angles. The main conclusion from this trajectory is the confirmation that, in the long *durée*, the host context prevails over projects. Practitioners often see projects as the utmost solution for the problems they have identified and overestimate their ability to change the host context. Such a pretentious perspective endures even within emerging approaches that aim to transform the project experience. We insist on looking for ways to make the project prevail over its context. We try to make it an iterative process, able to embed complexity and uncertainties, to make the project work in the way we, the guests, expect. Instead, as suggested by development anthropologists, we could accept that the project works anyway, whether in the way we expected or not, and that this is both a conscious and an unconscious process. A project is a lived experience that acquires other meanings and objectives during and after the period of its implementation.

This perspective on projects was developed by considering projects as institutions, in the sense of regularised practices that endure over time. Although we all know that some countries have been hosting development projects for decades, we tend to neglect the weight of past experiences when we start implementing a new project (see Bierschenk et al., 1991, for example). Many criticisms of development projects have pointed out their lack of consideration of the host country's history and particularities as a factor of failure. This research also shows that not only does the history of the context matter, but also the history of projects within that context. Seeing projects as an institution inserts the present intervention into a historical trajectory in which actors tend to reproduce old patterns of action which, in turn, consolidates the structure even more. This perspective also allows us to envisage how project institutions could change, and explains why radical changes in development cooperation paradigms, such as the imposition of project management models from the top, or the introduction of new paradigms, such as SSC, tend to fail, or at least to take an unexpected form. Inserted into an institutional continuum, change to development cooperation practice is a long process, as each actor shapes and is shaped by the prevailing structure.

In this sense, institutional bricolage proved to be a valuable framework within which to study the impact of projects in the host context. This concept has been applied to the challenges related to natural resource management institutions in different contexts (Cleaver, 2001;

Faggin and Behagel, 2018; Mosha et al., 2016; Sakketa, 2018; Sehring, 2009). It has allowed researchers to focus on how agents re-shape and negotiate institutions by combining, both consciously and unconsciously, arrangements drawn from various institutional settings. As such, the concept has provided a different perspective through which to understand the processes that occur when new institutional arrangements are introduced into a local setting with socially embedded institutions (see de Koning, 2011), including development interventions (Cleaver, 2002; Fokou and Bonfoh, 2016; Huggins and Mastaki, 2020; Osei-Amponsah et al., 2018; Sakketa, 2018). In this research, this concept has served to expand the analysis to multiple interventions in one sector across different periods. This thesis shows that institutional bricolage enables us to further our understanding of the interplay between past and subsequent interventions and not only between contemporary institutional settings, or formal and informal institutions.

With regards to the study of development cooperation, this approach resituates development cooperation project institutional arrangements within a historical perspective, giving each project and all projects combined a different weight. In this framework, development cooperation becomes a source of pieces that host actors necessarily combine with other pieces from different sources. As we cannot know the life trajectories of each actor who engages in development projects, the resulting combination of pieces from hosts and guests is inevitably unpredictable. This approach invites us to reconsider the capacity of projects to change the host context, making them appear less important than aid critics and supporters alike claim. However, if we consider projects as pieces, the more project pieces we have in the host context, the more diverse is the set of pieces that hosts can access to shape institutions. This also involves working with a variety of host actors, as each one of them can play a role in the interplay between structure and agency. The example of the introduction of SSC pieces in a consolidated field shows how the introduction of a different set of pieces disturbed the recurring structuration of development cooperation practice. The mismatch of practices that the introduction of SSC practices provoked has the potential to change regularised practices, as long as more initiatives take place. The new practices that traditional donors introduce face the same challenges. Whether such new resulting practices will become a pattern in the long term remains uncertain. This is a long and gradual pace of change that projects contribute to, piece by piece.

The resituating of a project in the host context and in the history of development cooperation questions the power relations that continue to govern development cooperation practice. During my analysis of my findings, I realised that many amid the donor and provider

communities still see the interplay between project and context in a paternalist way, in spite of changes in both the aid paradigm and practice. The discussion about the colonality of development studies and practice has gained momentum in recent years, and more and more calls for decolonising development permeate international development spaces (Aid Reimagined, 2019; Bhambra, 2020; Capan, 2017; Chiba and Heinrich, 2019; Clapham, 2020; Kornprobst et al., 2020; *ODI Bites: Decolonising International Development*, 2020; Pailey, 2020; Pinet and Leon-Himmelstine, 2020; Rana and Koch, 2020; Vieira, 2019, among many others). From this research, I conclude that the transformation of the development cooperation experience needs to take place in at least two different dimensions. First, the relationships within development projects continue to be marked by development cooperation colonality. But it is also in this field that we have seen more improvements, with efforts from implementers to transform the project social space by addressing unequal power relations when designing or defining project objectives, for example. Secondly, colonality, as a set of practices, also characterises the relations between development cooperation initiatives and the host context in both North-South and South-South projects. In this domain, the project is still presented as a model to follow, as a simulation of what the host context should be. In this regard, this research shows that host actors have a more precise understanding of what a project is and what it can do. Implementers, by contrast, continue to overestimate project content to the detriment of the dynamics that are already in place but that may be insufficiently Western or capitalist.

Finally, an approach to the colonality of development cooperation through these two dimensions implies that efforts to decolonise development cooperation initiatives require multi-dimensional and multi-sited political economy analyses. Recent developments in the cotton development assistance field in Benin are a good illustration of how complex the linkages are between the macro and micro levels. The rules of international trade are a product of the colonial system, with former colonies still providing commodities to the international market. In this arena, industrialised countries have promoted free trade in manufactured goods, while protecting their primary sector from international competition. The European Union and the United States, in particular, continue to provide large subsidies to their cotton farmers, keeping the supply of cotton in the international market high and prices low. When developing countries succeeded in putting some pressure on the WTO (see Sneyd, 2011, for a thorough historical analysis of this process), the response of the US and Europe was to implement projects to make African cotton competitive, instead of changing their agricultural policies. The multiplication of cotton projects since 2004 came instead of

compensation to African cotton producing countries or the end of subsidies. Thus, at the same time as these projects neutralised structural change at the macro level, they introduced sustainable agricultural practices which could have the potential to improve the life conditions of farmers. However, at the national level, the straightforward adoption of such practices could undermine the hierarchical positions of the dominant agents in the cotton sector and their status in the postcolonial state and in the capitalist world system. As a result, we have contradictory movements as we navigate from the macro to the micro level. This means that development cooperation projects and their pieces of bricolage take different meanings at different levels. Thus a project can be both an instrument and a challenger of unequal power relations, according to the scale and place of analysis. Hence, the coloniality of development cooperation must be approached both structurally, at the level of the international arena of struggle that gives life and purpose to projects, and specifically, at the level of projects and their insertion within the host context, lest any decolonial effect stemming from development encounters, expected or unexpected, be neutralised.

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APPENDICES

A.1. Anonymised list of research participants

#	Institutional affiliation	Date of meeting	Location	Code
1	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil	04/10/2017 and 13/02/2018	Cotonou	IDP#15
2	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil	04/10/2017, 13/02, and 01/06/2018	Cotonou	IDP#9
3	Brazilian Cooperation Agency	04 and 06/10, 10/11/2017, 13/02, 17/04, 01/06/2018	Cotonou, Parakou	IDP#7
4	Port of Cotonou	05.10.17	Cotonou	PAC#1
5	INRAB, CRA-CF	06/10/2017, 27/03, and 02/08/2018	Cotonou	INRAB#7
6	INRAB, CRA-CF	13, 19, 26/10/2017	Parakou	INRAB#1
7	INRAB, CRA-CF	19/10, 13/11/2017, and 09/04/2018	Parakou	INRAB#3
8	Cotton grower	25/10, 10/11/2017	Boko	CF#1
9	INRAB	26/10, 10 and 20/11/2017, 09/04/2018	Parakou	INRAB#4
10	Cotton grower	10 and 17/11/2017	Boko	CF#2
11	INRAB, CRA-CF	13/11/2017 and 09/04/2018	Parakou	INRAB#2
12	AIC	14/11/2017, 31/01, and 29/05/2018	Parakou	AIC#1
13	Cotton grower	17/11/2017 and 02/02/2018	Boko	CF#17
14	Cotton grower	17.11.17	Boko	CF#16
15	Cotton grower	17/11/2017 and 06/04/2018	Boko	CF#3
16	AIC	20/11/2017 and 09/07/2018	Parakou	AIC#2
17	Cotton grower	21/11/2017 and 24/05/2018	Kandi	CF#4
18	Cotton grower	21.11.17	Kandi	CF#13
19	Cotton grower	21/11/2017 and 24/05/2018	Kandi	CF#14
20	AIC	21/11/2017 and 24/05/2018	Kandi	AIC#3

21	Cotton grower	21.11.17	Banikoara	CF#5
22	AIC	21/11/2017 and 24/05/2018	Banikoara	AIC#4
23	MAEP	21.11.17	Banikoara	MAEP#7
24	MAEP	21.11.17	Banikoara	MAEP#8
25	MAEP	22/11/2017 and 07/02/2018	Banikoara	MAEP#3
26	INRAB, CRA-CF	22.11.17	Banikoara	INRAB#5
27	Cotton grower	22.11.17	Banikoara	CF#12
28	INRAB, CRA-CF	31/01/2018, 09/04, and 12/07/2018	Parakou	INRAB#6
29	SODECO (Ginner)	01.02.18	Parakou	GIN#1
30	SBTC (Ginner)	01.02.18	Parakou	GIN#2
31	Cotton grower	07.02.18	Toura	CF#6
32	Cotton grower	08.02.18	Kérou	CF#7
33	Cotton grower	08.02.18	Kérou	CF#8
34	MAEP	09.02.18	Péhunco	MAEP#4
35	MAEP	14/02, 28/03, and 20/04/2018	Cotonou	MAEP#1
36	MAEP	14.02.18	Cotonou	MAEP#9
37	AFD	14.02.18	Cotonou	IDP#1
38	IFDC Benin	16.02.18	Cotonou	IDP#2
39	AIC	26.03.18	Cotonou	AIC#5
40	AIC	26.03.18	Cotonou	AIC#6
41	Independent Consultant	27.03.18	Cotonou	IDP#3
42	CIRAD	27.03.18	Cotonou	IDP#4
43	CIRAD	27.03.18	Cotonou	IDP#5
44	GIZ	28.03.18	Cotonou	IDP#6
45	MAEP	07.04.18	Parakou	MAEP#5
46	INRAB, CRA-CF	09/04 and 22/05/2018	Parakou	INRAB#8

47	UD CVPC Borgou	11/04, 23/05, and 23/07/2018	Parakou	ORGP#6
48	Cotton grower	12.04.18	Bembereke	CF#9
49	AIC	12.04.18	Bembereke	AIC#7
50	MAEP	12.04.18	Bembereke	MAEP#6
51	Independent journalist	18.04.18	Abomey-Calavi	AIC#8
52	PNOPPA	19.04.18	Cotonou	ORGP#1
53	FAO	20.04.18	Cotonou	IDP#12
54	FAO	20.04.18	Cotonou	IDP#13
55	ANaF	25.04.18	Bohicon	ORGP#2
56	ANaF	25.04.18	Bohicon	ORGP#4
57	Cotton grower	28.04.18	Somewhere between Benin and Ethiopia	CF#10
58	SNV	17.05.18	Cotonou	IDP#16
59	AIC	23.05.18	Parakou	AIC#9
60	AIC	23.05.18	Parakou	AIC#10
61	AIC	23.05.18	Parakou	AIC#11
62	AIC	23.05.18	Parakou	AIC#12
63	Cotton grower	24.05.18	Kandi	AIC#13
64	GIZ	29.05.18	Parakou	IDP#8
65	Brazilian Cooperation Agency	01.06.18	Cotonou	IDP#10
66	IFDC	05.06.18	Cotonou	IDP#11
67	MAEP	06.06.18	Cotonou	MAEP#2
68	Port of Cotonou	07.06.18	Cotonou	CF#11
69	WTO	19.06.18	Geneva	OMC#1
70	CIRAD	01.08.18	Cotonou	IDP#14
71	Retired agronomist	03.08.18	Cotonou	ORGP

72	Plateforme des Acteurs de la Société Civile du Bénin (PASCIB)	06.08.18	Cotonou	ORGP#3
73	Agronomist	07.08.18	Cotonou	ORGP#5

A.2. Profiles of research participants

Table 8: Interviews and focus group discussions

Number of individuals met	72
<i>INRAB</i>	9
<i>MAEP</i>	9
<i>Cotton growers</i>	18
<i>UDCVPC</i>	1
<i>Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil</i>	4
<i>FAO</i>	2
<i>AFD</i>	1
<i>AIC</i>	12
<i>CIRAD</i>	4
<i>SODECO</i>	1
<i>SBTC</i>	1
<i>IFDC</i>	2
<i>PNOPPA</i>	1
<i>SNV</i>	1
<i>ANaF</i>	2
<i>GIZ</i>	2
<i>WTO</i>	1
<i>Port Authority of Cotonou</i>	1
Total interviews	83
In-depth interviews	57
Participant observation	5
Focus groups	3
Number of institutions	15

A.3. Questionnaire summary

Figure 16: Flow chart of the questionnaire

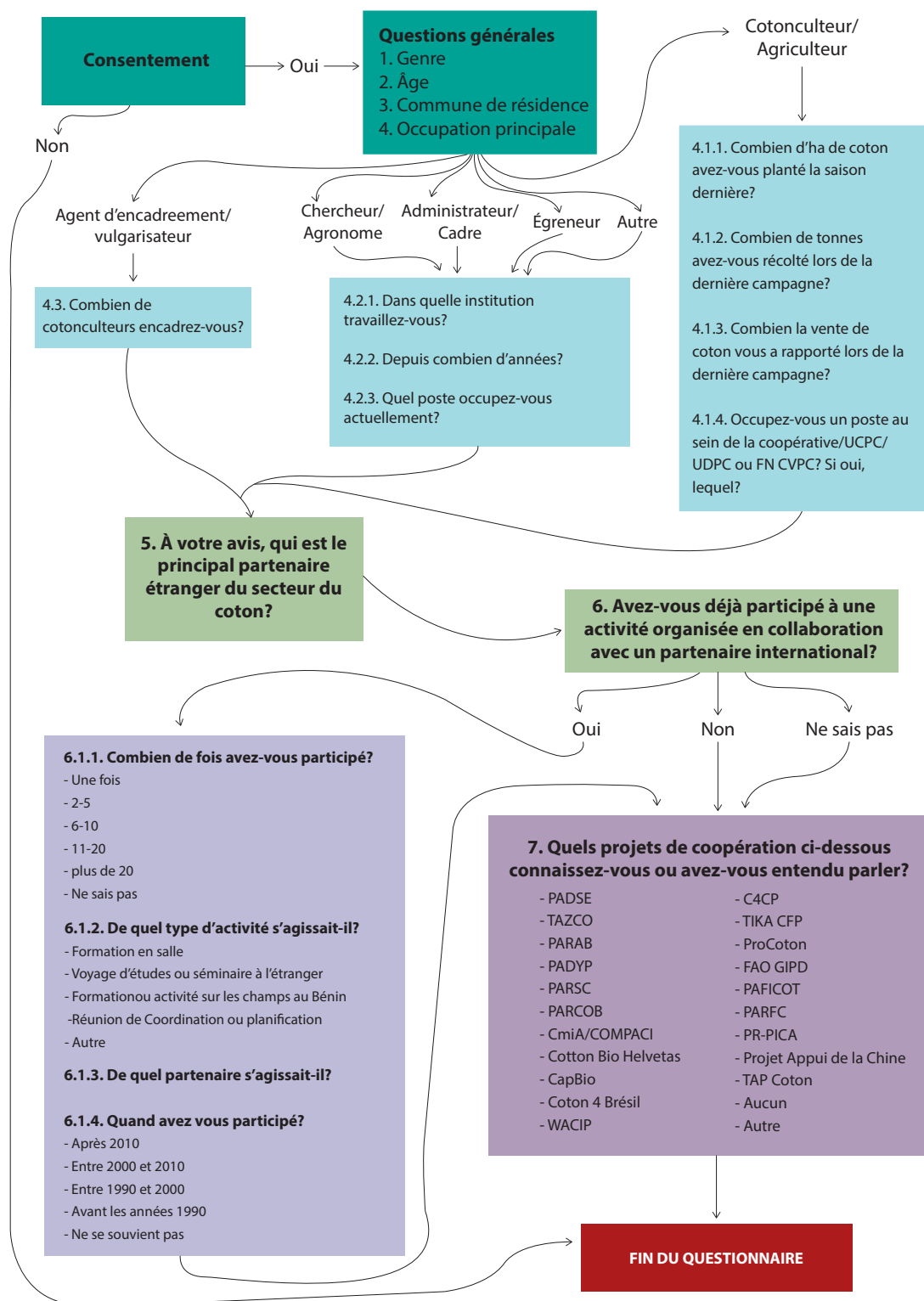


Table 9: Questionnaire summary and respondents' profiles

	Number	%
TOTAL	240	100%
Gender		
Women	17	7%
Men	223	93%
Median Age	35.2	
Commune of Residence		
Parakou	14	6%
Kandi	0	0%
Banikoara	113	47%
Kérou	100	42%
Cotonou	2	1%
Abomey-Calavi	2	1%
Nikki	1	0%
Bembereke	2	1%
Bobicon	1	0%
Sinendé	1	0%
Ndali	4	2%
Occupation		
Cotton grower/farmer	208	87%
Researcher/agronomist	7	3%
Administrator/manager	8	3%
Rural extension agent	16	7%
Ginner	0	0%
Other	1	0%
Participation in a development cooperation project		
Yes	60	25%
No	156	65%
Don't know	24	10%
How many times have you participated?		
Once	2	4%
2–5	29	52%
6–10	12	21%
11–20	3	5%
More than 20 times	10	18%
Kind of activity		
Training	49	82%
Study tour or workshop abroad	6	10%
Training or on-farm activity in Benin	48	80%
Planning, coordination, or restitution workshop	9	15%
Other	4	7%

Which partner?		
<i>Germany/ GIZ</i>	26	31%
<i>African Development Bank</i>	0	0%
<i>World Bank</i>	5	6%
<i>Brazil/ EMBRAPA/ ABC</i>	6	7%
<i>China</i>	2	2%
<i>CTB Belgian Technical Cooperation</i>	5	6%
<i>United-States/ USAID/ Millennium Account</i>	5	6%
<i>FAO</i>	2	2%
<i>France/ CIRAD/ AFD</i>	6	7%
<i>IFDC</i>	4	5%
<i>India</i>	2	2%
<i>The Netherlands/ SNV</i>	3	4%
<i>Switzerland/ Helvetas</i>	5	6%
<i>Turkey/ TIKA</i>	2	2%
<i>European Union</i>	2	2%
<i>UNPD</i>	2	2%
<i>Other</i>	7	8%
<i>Don't know</i>	48	57%
<i>If other, please specify</i>	CEDEAO	

When did you participate?		
<i>After 2010</i>	59	98%
<i>Between 2000 and 2010</i>	11	18%
<i>Between 1990 and 2000</i>	4	7%
<i>Before the 1990s</i>	1	2%
<i>Don't remember</i>	0	0%

A.4. Excerpts from interviews in original language

Page 66 :

Sa voix est prépondérante... quand il parle, plus personne ne parle. Puisqu'à lui seul il représentait, même parmi les égreneurs, il pesait plus lourd que tous les autres égreneurs. (AIC#8, 18/04/2018)

Le DG de la SONAPRA a actionné le monde entier, pratiquement. Il est allé en Estonie, dans ci, dans ça, et ainsi de suite, dans presque tous les pays où on pouvait trouver des intrants. Mais il n'a pas réussi à trouver un gramme d'intrant ! Il n'avait pas un gramme d'intrant qui pouvait coûter le prix qu'il avait offert... Il y avait donc une difficulté totale pour cette campagne. En mai, il n'y avait pas encore un gramme d'intrant dans le territoire, alors que la campagne démarre en juin. La situation était complètement bloquée. Ils ne savaient pas quoi faire. Et lors du conseil de ministres, Yayi Boni demande comment sortir de cet égrenage, et on lui a dit : il n'y a qu'une seule personne qui puisse sauver le Bénin, il n'y a qu'une personne, personne d'autre ne peut le faire en dehors de Talon. Personne d'autre ! (AIC#8, 18/04/2018)

Page 87 :

Je crois pas que je travaille de la même manière [dans un projet]. Le projet attend de moi un résultat là, tout de suite. Je lui donne le plus vite possible, de la meilleure manière. Quand c'est l'État, je me donne un peu plus de temps, parce que je sais que je ne serais pas vite évalué... donc, je me donne un peu plus de largesses, ça c'est vrai... Je travaille moins quand je travaille pour l'État que quand je travaille pour un projet, c'est vrai... Ce n'est pas qu'une question financière, c'est une question de savoir qu'on a pas de suivi derrière, oui. Je sais que, avant qu'on ne vienne me suivre ici, je sais que j'aurai fait tout ce que j'ai à faire. Et les procédures sont tellement longues que bon, je me permets quelques fois de m'amuser, voilà. (INRAB#8, 22/05/2018)

Lorsqu'un projet prend un expert pour venir nous former... ils ne vont pas bâcler le travail... lorsqu'il finit le travail, ils viennent sur le terrain pour vérifier, et si tu ne comprends pas ils t'expliquent à nouveau... Mais de l'autre côté, avec nos frères de l'AIC, ce que tu ne comprends pas ils viennent ils t'insultent devant les producteurs tout. Là, tu es frustré, tu ne peux pas faire un bon travail. (MAEP#4, 09/02/2018)

Page 88 :

Vous voyez, notre mal, ce que le producteur n'a pas les moyens... c'est pas en termes de moyens financiers. C'est des moyens... je sais pas... pas les moyens de vérifier la qualité des produits qu'on nous donne. Je vous avais dit que c'est un problème de l'État, c'est l'État qui devrait le faire. Mais, qu'est-ce qui prouve que ce que l'État a fait là, que c'est bien et que ça peut rapporter aux producteurs ? Mais nous organisations ne sont pas structurées jusqu'à ce niveau pour pouvoir faire cette contre-expertise. Donc on s'en tient à ce qu'on nous donne. Or les factures ne font que monter. Les produits qu'on a achetés cette année, la date de préemption est septembre, ou même août [2017]. (CF#3, 17/11/2017)

Page 89 :

La particularité c'est que quand un projet vient pour former comme ça, il y a un accompagnement qui suit. Il y a l'accompagnement, il y a les mesures incitatives au niveau du producteur qui suivent. Pour mettre le programme, par exemple, de WACIP, on a dit maintenant, les producteurs pilotes qui seront identifiés, on va leur donner gratuitement de l'engrais pour leur champ de démonstration. On dit maintenant aux agents qui abritent ces producteurs-là, lorsque vous venez pour des formations, il y a des per-diem qu'on vous paye. Et il y a des compléments de carburant qu'on vous donne chaque mois. Donc, au niveau des agents il y a des mesures d'accompagnement, au niveau des producteurs il y a des mesures d'incitation. Voilà comment est-ce qu'on travaille avec ces différents projets. (MAEP#5, 07/04/2018)

La différence des formations des deux institutions là ? ... Il faut connaître le monde des [bailleurs], il y a l'accompagnement qui existe, il y a une motivation, les producteurs qui s'engagent à travers la mise en place des matériels de travail. Ça fait que les gens sont vraiment motivés... par contre au niveau de l'INRAB, il y a peu de motivation, c'est à dire que, c'est ceux qui sont volontaires, qui veulent adopter, qui sont intéressés, ils viennent... c'est plus difficile de mettre en œuvre car ils n'ont aucune motivation.

Moi : de quel type de motivation parlez-vous ?

Je parle du matériel de travail. Par exemple, quand on fait du compostage en fosse. On met à la disposition des producteurs bénéficiaires des brouettes, des pelles, des bottes, pour faire l'activité. Alors que de l'autre côté, on va former les gens, voilà, voilà comment on fait, comment on utilise, ceci, ceci. L'activité s'arrête là. C'est la triste réalité, mais c'est la réalité. (AIC#4, 21/11/2017)

Dans la plupart des projets que j'ai connu, pour atteindre des objectifs on va trois fois plus vite que quand c'est dans l'administration ordinaire. Au CRA-CF, nous là, il faut d'abord faire signer le chef, le chef du chef du chef du chef... et finalement au bout d'un an, pfff, ce qui doit être fait n'est pas fait. Alors que dans un projet, généralement, ce que j'ai constaté, lorsque la décision est prise, puisque les moyens sont disponibles, très souvent il y a rien qui bloque quoi, très vite vous avez vos motos, même si c'est un tracteur, très vite vous l'avez... c'est ça que je voulais dire... (Focus group with CRA-CF agronomists on 09/04/2018)

Page 90 :

En dehors des cadres des projets... je peux dire qu'il n'y avait pas de formation, hen.. Pour le poste que j'occupais. Mais pour les agents qui sont sur le terrain, il y avait des formations pour leur montrer comment suivre les essais, recyclage... Il y a que les projets qui viennent et qui peuvent organiser ces formations-là. (INRAB#2, 13/11/2017)

Page 92 :

Bon, ils [les projets] choisissent... ça dépend des critères qu'ils ont défini. Si le projet a par exemple comme objectif d'impacter à la fin du projet 45% des femmes, donc, tu vois, le projet va dire 'ah, quand vous allez choisir 6 hommes, il faudrait qu'il y ait 4 femmes, dans le village'. Donc le projet vient selon les critères. Ou bien il va vous dire, 'ah, les producteurs que vous allez choisir, il faudrait que ce soient des producteurs qui disposent d'un cheptel, parce que moi, l'application que je veux mettre, je vous ai dit que la fumure de fond là, c'est la matière organique, la bouse de vache ou des résidus de récolte, donc, les producteurs qui

ont des cheptels, je peux les prendre, parce que je sais qu'en termes de disponibilité de bouses de vache, le problème ne va pas se poser. Il peut dire que je vais travailler avec les producteurs qui ont un rendement un peu amélioré... à 1200 kg/ha, lui, il va prendre ces producteurs. Donc, ça dépend des critères de l'objectif qu'on vise... C'est comme ça que ça marche. (MAEP#5, 07/04/2018)

Page 96 :

Il faut remarquer que ce n'est pas évident qu'un projet à l'échelle de deux ans, 4 ans même, 5 ans, puisse apporter quelque chose qui puisse impacter vraiment la culture – puisque c'est une culture annuelle, donc on le fait qu'une seule fois à l'année, donc tout ce qu'on lui apporte plutôt est évalué d'année en année. (INRAB#7, 02/08/2018)

Page 97 :

En fait, le problème de la temporalité est pour moi très important et l'afflux de ressources qui vient avec les projets contraint souvent le coordinateur, ou bien les acteurs de ce projet, à définir dans le temps qui leur est imparti et à montrer vite [les résultats] ... après quand bien même ils ont toujours une ligne durabilité, c'est toujours la ligne qui est difficilement remplie à la fin du projet. (INRAB#8, 09/04/2018)

Page 98 :

Les gens sont pressés, mais que ça ne devrait pas être ça, parce qu'avant que les résultats ne soient validés, il faut les tester d'abord. Bon, donc, il y a cette impatience-là dans la mise en œuvre des projets. (IDP#7, 17/04/2018)

Même si ça va marcher ça prend... ça prend, arrivé à un temps-là, quand le projet disparaît, c'est que on lâche. Rares sont ceux qui continuent avec l'innovation que les bailleurs ont voulu qu'on fasse. (MAEP#4, 09/04/2018)

Page 102 :

[Dans les années 1970] les blancs qui venaient acheter. C'est la Compagnie Française, en ce temps-là. Donc les français viennent aussi acheter et ils ont même leur acheteurs à part, et leurs encadreurs à part, en ce temps-là... Nous, jusqu'à présent, nous voyons que c'est le blanc qui achète, même actuellement, c'est le blanc qui achète. Parce que, ça reste pas ici. Tout ce qu'ils sont dans le Benin ici, là, ils ne sont que des organisateurs. Mais le coton même, ça va là-bas. Vous voyez, non ? (CF#6, 07/02/2018)

Page 105 :

C'est à partir donc de la colonie française... Des colons français, sont eux qui ont vraiment développé le coton et à un moment ils ont créé les centres de recherche... les premiers centres de recherche, c'est les colons. Même là où nous sommes là, c'est eux qui l'ont fait (INRAB#1, 19/10/2017)

Les français sont des partenaires de vieille date. Depuis nos ancêtres. (INRAB#2, 13/11/2017)

Page 106 :

Il y a des spécialistes français qui sont dans des institutions, dans des organismes internationaux et qui travaillent dans la zone intertropicale, c'est à dire dans l'Afrique de l'Ouest par exemple, ou bien en Afrique centrale... Donc, ils ont des chercheurs du CIRAD, mais qui travaillent dans nos zones ici depuis des années, qui ont des expériences dedans... Ils sont les connaisseurs du domaine - au moins c'est comme ça qu'on les prend, donc tout ce qu'ils disent c'est comme parole d'évangile... c'était comme ça... du point de vue scientifique, technique, ils nous apportaient beaucoup, et puis, on a plaisir à acquérir ces connaissances puisque nous savons que ça va nous servir après, même s'ils s'en vont quoi... (INRAB#2, 13/11/2017)

Les français, ils ne sont pas trop différents de nous. [Silence] Pour faire quelque chose, c'est d'abord les moyens avant l'activité... le système français, c'est bon quand on a la disponibilité financière, matérielle, avant de démarrer une activité, parce qu'après on pourra demander des comptes rendus... pour rendre compte, quoi. (INRAB#6, 31/01/2018)

Page 111 :

Le faire-faire est une nouvelle méthode, différente de l'habitude... Ici, les béninois dirigent les activités... les pratiques endogènes sont là. On a essayé de faire ça, d'adapter à notre réalité et disséminer à travers des formations où on partage nos expériences... c'est un projet inclusif. (ORGP#2, 25/04/2018)

Page 112 :

Les ressources de ces projets, qui va manger, qui va pas manger, c'était ça qui créait les difficultés entre les producteurs... Les cotonculteurs étant appuyés au sein de la FUPRO par le projet de la Banque Mondiale, PARFC, il y a un certain nombre de ressources qui sont mises à leur disposition. Ces ressources placées à la FUPRO, seront noyées dans plusieurs activités qui ne sont pas nécessairement coton. (AIC#8, 18/04/2018)

Page 113 :

Il faut former les producteurs, tout ça là, parce qu'on cherche toujours à améliorer à avoir plus de ce qui existait. Donc, s'il n'y a pas de formation, ça peut pas aller... c'est là où les partenaires devraient nous appuyer. Par exemple, maintenant, si on pouvait trouver un partenaire pour l'UD qui pourrait nous aider, à améliorer, à avoir, à amener les informations jusqu'au bout, vous voyez? Ici déjà, construire une bibliothèque... et le matériel technique. Parce que ça aussi, c'est comme si c'était une marque déposée...qui reste de générations en générations, mais sans l'équipement- on a un problème d'équipement, ça ne peut pas aller... On a envie hein... on envie de se développer, mais il y a les moyens aussi qui manquent. (ORGP#6, 11/04/2018)

Page 119 :

J'ai rencontré aussi une équipe du Brésil, il y a de cela deux ans... ils font du coton bio. J'étais dans une structure faitière départementale. Donc eu je les ai rencontrés dans le cadre de responsable départementale, pour voir comment introduire le coton bio dans nos zones... des brésiliens, mais avec des allemands aussi... c'était une réunion de planification... donc c'est eux qui sont venus vers nous... alors pourquoi ils n'ont pas donné suite, je sais pas pourquoi. (CF3#, 17/11/2017)

En fait, ceux dont je parlais c'était pour pouvoir maintenir le sol sans les engrais chimiques... pour voir quelles sont les avantages et les inconvénients du coton bio et du coton chimique[sic]. (CF#3, 17/11/2017)

Page 120 :

En fait, les gens ont fait une semaine... les CPV, c'est eux qui ont été formés, nous, les producteurs, on nous a appelé le dernier jour pour aller sur le terrain... Donc comme c'est eux [CPV] qui étaient chargés de nous suivre sur le terrain... Donc voilà l'expérience qu'on a eu. Et c'était des brésiliens qui portaient le projet.... Je sais pas si c'est... C 4... ou si c'est C3 plus Togo... Il y a un projet C4 là... c'est par rapport à ça qu'on était là. Mais nous, on nous a ciblé nous, ceux qui font la semence de base là, pour aller sur le terrain voir comment est-ce qu'on peut maintenir nos sols fertiles quand on fait le coton avec l'apport de la fumure chimique... c'est ce que moi j'ai retenu par rapport à cette expérience là... mais il n'y a pas eu de formation avec module ou documents ou trucs comme ça. (CF#3, 06/04/2018)

Page 121 :

Le C4 a démarré au Bénin en 2010... ou 2008, 2010, la période là, ça nous a formé à Parakou, c'est après ça qu'il y a eu des phases qu'on a eu à assister à Bamako... En 2016 je suis encore réparti à Bamako... je suis [allé] assister une formation au Brésil, tout récemment, en 2017. J'ai fait trois mois là-bas... pendant tout mon séjour... j'ai eu le temps de connaître au moins les zones productrices du Brésil... où j'ai compris que vraiment, effectivement, le coton est vraiment développé... et j'ai compris que, effectivement, quand on prend le coton, le coton est une culture de rente qui peut vraiment nous permettre de valoriser nos richesses, dans nos pays. (MAEP#3, 07/02/2018)

Quand nous, on voit un expatrié... tout ce que l'expatrié va nous sortir, quel que soit ce qu'il est en train de dire, on dit 'reste à vérifier'... ou bien on peut lui dire, ce qui se passe à l'extérieur ce n'est pas la même qui peut se passer ici, parce qu'il y a le climat qui diffère, il y a aussi les moyens. Donc on arrive à montrer à ces derniers ce qui se passe chez vous, ce n'est pas la même chose...

La seule formation que j'ai fait avec les brésiliens j'ai tellement apprécié, j'ai toujours parlé de ça... Ils mettent tout en œuvre pour que vous même vous voyez ce qui se passe chez eux et ce qui se passe chez vous et à vous de voir comment vous allez équilibrer les choses pour que ça marche... Les allemands ne montrent pas ce qui se passe là-bas. Ils viennent seulement nous dire 'vous devriez faire ceci' 'vous allez faire ceci' et ils ne viennent pas directement eux-mêmes. Ils prennent des experts béninois, des docteurs, des experts des autres pays qui viennent travailler, eux, ils viennent seulement suivre. (MAEP#4, 09/02/2018)

Page 122 :

Par rapport aux chinois, il vaut mieux être franc... Ah, c'est difficile, travailler avec les chinois. Bon, dans un premier temps, ceux à qui on avait à faire là, nous on estimait qu'ils n'étaient pas des spécialistes du domaine... Il y a des éléments, comme des b-a-ba en sciences que, si tu es un scientifique et que tu ne connais pas, ou bien que si tu cherches à contredire, on te prends en même temps comme quelqu'un qui n'est pas du domaine. Donc ça fait que nous, on doute que ça soit vraiment des gens du domaine... ceux qui étaient ici, ne nous ont pas

permis de faire les expérimentations qu'il faut pour tirer des notions de leur méthode de travail, alors que c'était très intéressant pour moi... Donc eux, en tout cas ceux à qui on a eu affaire, c'était très très très difficile de collaborer avec eux. (INRAB#2, 13/11/2017)

On a pas à dire ce qu'on souhaitait avoir. Quand vous venez dans une structure de recherche, c'est que c'est gagnant-gagnant. Une fois que vous êtes arrivé, et nos variétés vous battent déjà, ça veut dire que bon, on a pas grand-chose à prendre chez vous. (INRAB#3, 13/11/2017)

Eux autres [les Turcs] ils viennent nous inculquer directement des trucs là que c'est bon, c'est bon. On ne peut pas amener quelque chose à la recherche pour dire que c'est bon. C'est bon chez eux, mais ici chez nous, il faut qu'on teste pour voir si c'est bon. (INRAB#3, 13/11/2017)

Page 123 :

[INRAB#2] Dans la partie de protocole qu'ils ont fait et qu'on a amendé – ça n'avait pas bien de poids. Si on dit, on va faire telle densité, et eux proposent : on va faire telle densité, nous, on dit non. A la mise en œuvre, nous, on est pas là-bas, on a d'autres tâches aussi, ils font ce qu'ils ont pensé

[INRAB#3] Ils ne tiennent pas compte des amendements

[INRAB#2] Alors qu'il y a des réalités du Bénin ici, que nous connaissons, et eux ne savent pas (13/11/2017)

Non, ce n'est pas les mêmes approches. Souvent ils viennent avec leur argent et ils dépensent leur argent. Les chinois ils viennent avec leur argent, ils dépensent, les turcs, ils viennent avec leur argent, ils dépensent... les indiens, ils viennent avec leur argent, ils dépensent... les brésiliens c'est encore plus grave, parce qu'ils ne viennent même pas avec de l'argent [rires] c'est de là-bas qu'ils disent ce qu'il faut faire avec l'argent. C'est plus grave. (INRAB#7, 02/08/2018)

Ils n'ont même pas l'argent des brésiliens... ce n'est pas grand-chose. (INRAB#1, 19/10/2017)

Page 124 :

L'inconvénient c'est que les moyens ne soient pas réellement utilisés pour faire le travail réel... par moments on peut dévier pour aller faire autre chose avec. C'est ça qui devient l'avantage dans le système brésilien, puisque lui il veut voir le travail fait avant d'encaisser l'argent. L'inconvénient de là-bas, devient l'avantage ici. Puisqu'il faut forcément s'y mettre avant d'avoir les sous quoi. Mais moi je crois quand même que ce système est bien puisque dans le cadre du projet, c'est une innovation qu'on veut partager... Le fait même de le faire est à notre avantage, donc quand les gars agissent comme ça, je crois qu'ils ont en partie raison aussi, parce que... il faut qu'on coure à notre bien-être. (INRAB#6, 31/01/2018)

Du point de vue logistique, leur façon de gestion ne prend pas en compte nos traditions d'ici. Vous voyez, non. C'est à dire que... je prends un exemple simple, dans une formation, il y a des formateurs que vous avez invité, il y a des producteurs que vous avez invité. Vous voyez ? Maintenant, dans nos traditions ici, le formateur sera plus payé que le producteur. Il sera plus rémunéré que le producteur. Déjà comme principe de base, quoi. Mais chez eux, on a

constaté que c'est le contraire. Les producteurs sont plus payés que les formateurs. (INRAB#2, 13/11/2017)

Page 125 :

Tous les projets sont pas comme ça. Donc, ça fait que systématiquement la grille de paiements des formateurs c'est à part, et quelles que soient les situations, le formateur est plus payé que le participant. (INRAB#3, 13/11/2017)

Page 126 :

Le problème que nous avons eu c'est que nous avons demandé au conseil de ministres qui avait autorisé au temps de l'ancien ministre de viabiliser le site, mais dans la mise en œuvre on a toujours de problèmes. On a jamais réussi à le faire. Donc, on peut avoir le groupe [électrogène] et commencer à travailler avec le groupe, le temps qu'on écrive, parce qu'à l'échelle d'un pays, il faut faire une demande en septembre et voir que c'est financé en septembre de l'année suivante, parce que c'est le budget national. (INRAB#7, 02/08/2018)

Page 128 :

[Les chinois] se sont vite rendus compte que le transfert de technologie ce n'est pas évident, que nous, nous avons nos technologies et eux, ils ont leur technologie et que ce n'est pas forcément des problèmes de technologie, c'est beaucoup plus d'autres problèmes qui seraient bien d'aller solutionner. Après les analyses, si bien de leur côté que de notre côté, il était question alors de voir comment est-ce qu'il faut améliorer les technologies qui existent ici, en essayant de voir quelles sont les insuffisances et quelles sont les forces, les faiblesses de ces technologies-là. Et rentre également l'accent sur la mécanisation de l'agriculture. Comment est-ce que nous allons mécaniser l'agriculture de manière à conserver les sols et à avoir les résultats attendues de manières durable ? (INRAB#7, 02/08/2018)

[Nous allons] recruter un agent, un mécanicien, spécialiste en mécanisation qui va travailler auprès d'eux [l'équipe chinoise] pour leur inculquer notre nouvelle vision de la mécanisation. Ce n'est plus le labour systématique, c'est le labour minimum. Notre mécanicien va travailler avec eux pour quand même permettre de percer un peu sur cette expérience. (INRAB#7, 02/08/2018)

Page 129 :

Depuis le mois d'août [2017], nous n'avons pas de financement. Tous les travaux qui ont été fait du mois d'août jusqu'en décembre, c'est moi même qui ait supporté. De janvier jusqu'à maintenant, ça y est tous les salaires sont payés, c'est moi même qui ait supporté. Je suis obligé, pour ne pas subir le coût des contrôle, je suis obligé de passer les activités carrément dans les activités du CRA-CF, de considérer que le projet ne va pas rembourser, parce que si tu regardes le mécanisme de fonctionnement des projets, normalement ils ne peuvent pas me rembourser, ils disent : il faut d'abord une demande, il faut qu'on autorise de faire de la dépense. Alors que j'ai déjà fait la dépense. Je risque de commencer par pleurer pour dire : donnez-moi... Et voilà que j'ai déjà écrit le nom du projet sur la dépense, je ne peux plus modifier. (INRAB#7, 02/08/2018)

J'ai demandé à mon conseiller d'administration d'autoriser à ce que nous inscrivions [les dépenses du projet] comme des activités. Puisque l'activité, elle est bonne, tout le monde a

reconnu que c'est bien. Si le bailleur, à cause de ces problèmes de procédures ne veut pas financer, tsc, on oublie ça et puis on prend... les activités vont porter la griffe du C4+Togo, mais dans la réalité, il n'y a pas ça... Mais il faut qu'on fasse d'une manière qu'on mobilise des fonds pour financer nous-mêmes et laisser le projet faire ce qu'il veut. Si c'est pour faire voyager les gens, il n'y a qu'à le faire le temps qu'il veut, si c'est pour venir pour former les gens, il n'a qu'à venir ici pour former les gens... mais, il ne faut pas que nous restions dépendants du projet... Quand on sera dans le comité de pilotage, on va leur dire, que nous allons désormais travailler sans eux. S'ils viennent, c'est bon, s'ils ne viennent pas, c'est pas grave. Nous allons le faire. Il y a les moyens pour le faire, donc il vaut mieux qu'on le fasse. (INRAB#7, 02/08/2018)

Page 135 :

Ce sont des projets de développement, qui ont travaillé pour faire développer la filière. Ils ont beaucoup travaillé sur la pratique paysanne, ont beaucoup travaillé sur le conseil, sur le renforcement des capacités... Et ils ont effectivement eu leur impact sur les résultats, parce que la production a été multipliée par quatre pendant tout le temps que ces projets ont travaillé. Et on a eu les résultats derrière sur la décennie qui a suivi. Donc c'est très bon. (INRAB#7, 02/08/2018)

Page 136 :

C'est vrai qu'il y a eu de l'argent frais disons pour avoir des ressources pour structurer-puisque l'AIC était à son début au moment où le projet Banque Mondiale a été exécuté. Il n'y avait presque rien en ce moment-là. La mise en place des manuels de procédures, tout ce qui est organisationnel, c'était avec l'appui de la Banque Mondiale que c'était mis en place. Même le personnel de l'AIC a été recruté, le premier personnel technique de l'AIC a été recruté sur la base de ces fonds... Pour qu'on dise que l'AIC doive prélever un montant sur chaque kilo de coton graine vendu, c'était une étude financée par le programme. Et à quoi ce montant doit servir c'est une étude qui a indiqué cela. Donc, c'est pratiquement ce programme qui a mis en place toute la structure de l'AIC, ça, c'est indéniable. (AIC#8, 18/04/2018)

Page 138 :

Par le passé on faisait des adaptations à travers les variétés exotiques, mais depuis 1996, le centre même a son programme en bonne et due forme de création variétale... C'était avec les partenaires français, que le programme de création variétale a été mis sur place... Donc aujourd'hui nous avons plusieurs variétés déjà dans nos centres... Actuellement on a trois en vulgarisation. (INRAB#1, 19/10/2017)

Page 139 :

INRAB#4 : En fait, ce n'est pas un projet comme les autres projets, c'est un projet spécifique à la recherche... on a pu former dans ce projet les gens, donc c'est ça qui a permis une pérennisation, contrairement aux autres projets, les projets de développement, vous voyez, ce genre de projets, la stratégie n'est pas forcément la même... au niveau de la recherche, on continue encore de bénéficier des fruits de ce projet qui était passé, donc on continue les actions dans ce sens.

INRAB#6 : Dans le cadre par exemple de PARAB, PARCOB, comme nous on est dans la nécessité de faire la sélection variétale, la création variétale, malgré que le projet est parti, ça continue... les gens ont été formés – parce que c'est spécifique là. Dans les autres cas, si à la fin- moi, mon avis, hein- si les gens n'adoptent pas, c'est qu'ils n'ont pas besoin.

INRAB#8 : je ne suis pas d'accord. Je ne suis pas d'accord, parce que, regardez, dans PARCOB, PARAB là, ceux dont les compétences avaient besoin d'être améliorées et qui ont vu leurs compétences améliorées, il faut le compter aux bouts des doigts. C'est une toute petite équipe de la recherche, donc le type d'acteur impliqué, et le mécanisme est tel que, avec ou sans le projet, il y aurait section génétique, qui aurait des ressources qui seraient toujours affectées à ce qu'on fasse les essais, à ce qu'on fasse la sélection.

Page 140 :

C'est difficile d'amener un produit d'ailleurs qui soit compétitif dans notre dispositif [de création variétale]. C'est le secteur où le CRA-CF a le plus investi ces vingt dernières années. (INRAB#7, 02/08/2018)

Page 143 :

Parce que ça demande, d'abord, le savoir-faire du producteur dans la connaissance des ravageurs, ils doivent venir faire des observations dans les champs, il ne peut pas venir traiter n'importe comment, hein. Il doit observer, compter, pour voir le nombre d'insectes présents et les types d'insecte présents... donc selon les types d'insecte qu'il va rencontrer dans le champ, il va avoir le produit, tout ça là... C'est pas facile. Or, l'autre méthode dit : vous faites sept traitements chaque deux semaines. Vous venez, les trois premiers traitements et les deux premiers traitements vous utilisez tel produit... il vient seulement et il applique chaque deux semaines, c'est facile, hein? Mais l'autre on a dit : il faut faire des observations chaque semaine, s'il y a problème, tu fais traitement... c'est pas facile. Le producteur n'a pas le temps – ils ont beaucoup de choses à faire et c'est aussi un peu une organisation spontanée... et il y a aussi l'ignorance. (AIC#3, 21/11/2017)

Page 144 :

Parce que la LEC il y a lutte ciblée. Pour cibler là, ça veut dire que tu fais les observations. Si un producteur fait les observations avant de traiter, ça veut dire qu'il fait déjà LEC. (INRAB#4, 20/11/2017)

Beaucoup ne connaissent pas PADSE, dans le coton on parle de LEC, et quand on dit LEC, immédiatement il faut faire référence au projet PADSE. Mais ça a marqué son temps quand même. Les acquis sont là, hein ?! Les producteurs connaissent, seulement que, il suffit que nous, nous les décideurs qu'on prenne la décision de poursuivre la technologie, là les producteurs suivront, les producteurs sont prêts à continuer. (INRAB#4, 20/11/2017)

Page 145 :

[Le projet] leur permet [aux producteurs] d'économiser des produits. Donc, c'est devenu un enjeu [entre] les distributeurs d'intrants, producteurs [il montre ces mains comme dans une balance, pour montrer les poids des différentes catégories] Vous voyez ? (Rires) C'est les distributeurs finalement [qui ont gagné]... C'était des affaires de gros sous (INRAB#1, 19/10/2017)

Page 146 :

Tous les projets qui sont arrivés après 2004-2005 ou 2006 s'inscrivent dans l'initiative C-4 avec comme objectif d'aider les filières à être compétitives sur le marché international. Donc leur objectif est suffisamment clair. Il n'était pas question de venir donner des moyens aux acteurs sur le terrain – non, ce n'était pas ça. Sur quel levier on met l'accent pour que le coton qui est produit soit compétitif sur le marché international. Chaque acteur, chaque projet a essayé de prendre des objectifs spécifiques dans cet objectif global. (INRAB#7, 02/08/2018)

Il y a beaucoup de projets, chacun vient avec une technique différente et pense qui est la meilleure (AIC#5, 16/03/2018)

Page 147 :

La différence c'est que, au niveau de l'IFDC, la gestion intégrée de la fertilité des sols, on part sur certains concepts par rapport aux différentes plantes qui peuvent améliorer la fertilité des sols. Alors qu'au niveau de la GIZ, c'est beaucoup plus des mesures de conservation... Donc, il y a des méthodes mécaniques de conservation du sol qui ont été apprises également aux producteurs... on a fait pas mal. Également j'ai travaillé avec le projet...on appelle ça WACIP. Vous connaissez WACIP ? Donc, WACIP également, on a travaillé, c'est un projet américain, WACIP a travaillé sur le coton et dans le cadre de l'amélioration des rendements... donc la fumure de fond est souvent la fumure organique, et cette fumure organique peut être la bouse de vache ou des résidus de récolte... donc voilà ce qu'ils font eux autres, leur approche. (MAEP#5, 07/04/2018)

Quand on nous avait recruté en 2007, c'était vraiment bon, c'était le bon temps, la culture du coton, puisqu'en ce moment il y avait les projets, programmes. On avait le projet WACIP, financé par la Banque Mondiale [sic] qui nous appuyait régulièrement. On était recruté, franchement, on avait pas d'expérience, on nous appelait régulièrement pour les formations, on nous formait. Mais, avec le temps, WACIP a fini, le projet PAFICOT est venu, toujours sur le coton, le projet PAFICOT est venu, toujours sur le coton, et ça a continué avec les mêmes activités que WACIP faisait. (MAEP7#, 21/11/2017)

Pendant cette période-là, nous agents de terrain, on se plaignait pas. (MAEP#8, 21/11/2017)

Page 149 :

Ah, on en a pas [matières organiques]! ... On compte beaucoup sur les peuls, mais les peuls ne restent pas sur place... ils sont obligés d'aller dans les forêts classées... Ceux qui ont la chance d'avoir [des animaux] et de stocker des forages, de faire des forages pour ça là, ils peuvent bénéficier de ça. Mais ça c'est insuffisant... Même, les choses des WC là, quand vous videz les WC, certains producteurs maintenant [utilisent ça] ça enrichit aussi le sol, mais beaucoup n'aiment pas [rires]. (CF#4, 21/11/2017)

La technique là, il faut faire fosse comme ça là... Tu mets les tiges, le caca des bêtes et tu mets l'eau. Dans trois mois après ça va pourrir tu vas verser dans le champ, même si tu n'as pas utilisé l'engrais, ça peut aller... Seulement que c'est un peu difficile. Il faut avoir des matériels pour pouvoir faire. Sinon, quand ça va pourrir, il faut avoir des brouettes avec lesquelles tu vas ramasser. C'est pas facile, mais c'est bon. (CF#7, 08/02/2018)

Page 152 :

Bon, en fait, l'année dernière ils s'étaient engagés pour faire de l'intensification. Mais en réalité, c'est pas de l'intensification, c'est l'appui à l'adoption de technologies, c'est l'appui à l'adoption des fiches techniques, parce que parler d'intensification c'est comme s'ils inventaient quelque chose... ni en approche, ni en technologie... ils n'inventent rien. C'est nous qui avons mis en place les nouvelles formules d'engrais, c'est nous qui avons mis en place les nouvelles doses d'engrais qui sont adaptées aux différentes régions... Aussi, nous avons travaillé avec l'USAID sur l'utilisation du compost, de l'engrais vert, tout ça, pour booster la production, donc, si dans leur projet dit d'intensification c'est demander au producteur d'utiliser la dose d'engrais recommandée par la recherche, avec la formule d'engrais recommandée par la recherche, et d'apporter de la matière organique au sol... mais il y a pas un projet... Ce qui a fait augmenter la production c'est quoi : étant donné qu'on a adopté des nouvelles doses d'engrais, qu'on a augmenté les engrais, et que derrière on a demandé aux gens, dans la mesure du possible, d'apporter de la matière organique, ça fait que la quantité totale d'engrais apportée au cotonnier a augmenté. (INRAB#7, 02/08/2018)

Quand on parle d'intensification il ne faut pas forcer, parce qu'il y a des contraintes derrière. S'il faut aller chercher des débris, les bouses de vache pour jeter dans son champ là, ou bien eux même faire le compostage, c'est des efforts en plus, donc il faut que ça soit vraiment volontaire, il faut que ça soit le producteur qui soit convaincu qu'il faut ça... Mais nous on insiste surtout sur l'intérêt pour le producteur pour le faire, parce qu'on estime que c'est plus rentable et c'est de plus en plus vers quoi il faut aller. Surtout que l'AIC a commencé par intégrer dans sa façon de faire les mesures de gestion durable de terres et même d'adaptation au changement climatique. Donc, par rapport à ces préoccupations, pour lesquelles le personnel déjà a subi la formation, est à répercuter sur les producteurs pour atteindre vraiment des réels changements au niveau des producteurs, de plus en plus, pour qu'on ne détruise plus le sol, il faut que le producteur fasse attention comment faire pour que le même sol puisse lui servir pendant plusieurs années. Donc c'est vraiment de plus en plus un souci au niveau de l'AIC. (AIC#2, 09/07/2018)

Page 153 :

Il faisait partie de ceux qui combattaient la recherche. Mais, s'il combat c'est pas parce qu'il ne connaît pas. Il connaît très bien ce que la recherche peut apporter... peut être qu'il voulait rester en cachette pour prendre les résultats de la recherche et les utiliser et refuser d'investir dedans. Maintenant il a changé de position. Il sait de quoi la recherche a besoin... et c'est lui qui impose maintenant que toutes les activités soient initiées par la recherche, soient instruites par la recherche... Donc, maintenant qu'il est arrivé, c'est que vous devez savoir c'est que désormais ce n'est plus l'homme d'affaires qui parle, c'est le chef de l'État qui parle. Il sera

comptable des résultats de son travail de chef de l'État. Si aujourd'hui on dit que la recherche est bien, c'est [grâce à] lui, c'est lui, c'est pas l'AIC. (INRAB#7, 02/08/2018)

Page 154 :

Nous aimons trop le repos ! Après la récolte on a rien à faire, on reste comme ça, à la maison, on attend encore la pluie, tu vois ? C'est pas bien. (CF#7, 08/02/2018)

Page 156 :

Il s'est dit, par rapport à la technologie qu'ils ont appris des brésiliens, de ne plus arracher, de ne plus débroussailler son champ, donc, qu'il fallait laisser quand même certaines espèces pousser et qu'il l'a fait une première fois et que les voisins, même sa propre femme était déçue, elle disait: quoi? on va voir ton champ comme ça, mal entretenu... c'est pas bien! Il faut faire comme les autres et nettoyer ton champ, pour qu'on sache que tu es un brave homme. Il s'est dit : mais qu'est-ce qu'il fallait faire ? Fallait suivre ce qu'on lui a dit dans le cadre du projet, laisser le champ comme ça, ou est-ce qu'il faut faire comme tout le monde, travailleur, aller enlever tout... il s'est mis à beaucoup hésiter, mais que finalement, il s'est dit que non, que ce qu'on lui apprend au niveau du projet ne doit pas être mauvais, qu'il allait laisser ça comme ça. Mais qu'il était surpris favorablement quand il est allé voir ses tubercules dans le sol... Les racines au niveau du coton aussi étaient bien entrées et que ça a donné plus, quoi, je sais pas si en termes de qualité du coton, ou bien, mais qu'il s'est rendu compte que vraiment- qu'il s'est dit qu'il était paresseux, mais que les résultats étaient là et les gens l'ont félicité en retour maintenant, en disant ça là, vraiment, c'est bien, c'est bien... au départ ce n'était pas facile, parce que c'était quelque chose de nouveau, mais qu'avec le temps ils se sont aperçus que vraiment c'était pour leur bien. (IDP#7, 17/04/2018)

C'était une formation qu'on appelait... PAFICOT. Oui, c'est PAFICOT qui nous a formés. Donc... euh... si le coton ça donne très bien, on peut trouver jusqu'à 1 tonne 500 par hectare. Si on donne le prix et on supprime toutes les dépenses, vous allez voir que nous à terre, on tombe. Mais si ce n'était pas à cause de la formation, moi je ne savais pas qu'on était perdant. Pour moi, on mange comme on veut et on oublie ce qu'on a dépensé. Donc à cause de cette formation, ça nous aidé, ah ! si on pouvait continuer à avoir des formations comme ça... vraiment ! Beaucoup de gens même vont vouloir laisser le coton. (CF#6, 07/02/2018)

CF#7 : Les encadreurs, ils nous forment dans quelle période il faut semer, dans quelle période il faut mettre l'engrais, tout ça... Mais l'autre projet, c'est pas ça là-bas, ça concerne nous bien là, comment tu vas faire la planification, c'est des choses comme ça... dans le mois de septembre, on a fait aussi une formation qui m'a fait très peur. Vraiment. Ils nous ont dit que les produits que nous utilisons ne sont pas bons à consommer. Tous les engrais et autres, insecticides, tout ça, ce n'est pas bon.

Moi : Mais ils disaient qu'il fallait arrêter d'utiliser les produits?

CF#7 : Bon, il a bien dit de ne pas utiliser ça dans le vivrier. Et si nous utilisons encore, de ne pas utiliser ça aux bords des cours d'eau, puits, consorts comme ça.

CF#8 : ça va tuer les poissons et les animaux.

CF#7 : ça peut nous rendre malades aussi.

Moi : Vous avez le choix par rapport aux produits?

CF#7 : Bon, on nous amène seulement, on dit c'est ça là qu'il faut utiliser, comme ça. On a pas le choix. (CF#7 et CF#8, 08/02/2018)

Page 157 :

Ceux qui viennent de l'extérieur, il veut vraiment avoir [des informations] ... eux même ils viennent voir, prennent notes et ils écoutent les choses... si c'est un béninois par exemple, il amène aucun papier ici et ce qu'on dit là, il ne peut pas retenir tout. Si c'est bon, ou pas bon, c'est pareil. (CF#1, 25/10/2017)

Nos relations avec les formateurs, c'est très bon, on ne peut pas dire que c'est pas bon... le problème, il faut qu'ils nous avertissent tôt... Parce qu'aujourd'hui j'ai dit, c'est tout à l'heure qu'on vient de m'appeler pour une séance maintenant, à N'Dali, et je n'étais pas au courant depuis hier... Même l'argent d'essence je n'ai pas. Donc si je savais depuis, je saurais comment me déplacer. (CF#2, 10/11/2017)

Page 158 :

Si moi je veux dérouler une formation, je les préviens d'abord, le jour la date et le lieu. Je vais en avance les attendre pour qu'ils sachent que le retard n'est pas permis à tout moment. Donc, lorsque tu commences, vous commencez, tu les amènes à comprendre que c'est que tu es en train de dire est pertinent. Ce que tu es en train de leur donner comme formation est pertinente, ils sont dans ce besoin... il y a des gens qui sont réticents, il y a des gens qui acceptent les règles en même temps. (MAEP#4, 09/02/2018)

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Il y avait... disons, 30 ou 40 personnes... il y avait des producteurs, il y avait la GIZ, il y avait quelques représentants d'ONGs, il y avait surtout le comité de pilotage. Mais on appelait tout le monde... Il y avait des agents de terrain comme moi, donc ils essaient de faire représenter toutes le couches (INRAB#8, 22/05/2018)

Page 164 :

Normalement un projet qui vient au Bénin, ou n'importe où, il va falloir que ce projet ait comme un partenaire sur le terrain, une structure durable, qui soit vraiment le ciment, qui soit vraiment l'appui de ce projet-là. Simplement parce que, lors que c'est une structure qui est bien établie, derrière le projet, cette structure-là peut perpétuer, capitaliser les informations et les données. Il faut également que ces structures aient un minimum de moyens pour être en mesure de venir en aide à ce projet lorsque ce projet est en difficulté pendant sa mise en œuvre. Il faut que la structure ait les moyens pour venir en aide - c'est à dire pour combler les insuffisances des projets pendant sa période de mise en œuvre. (INRAB#7, 02/08/2018)

Page 167 :

Le coton c'est ça, c'est un maillon vraiment dense, où tout le monde veut se retrouver autour pour bouffer. Parce que c'est là, où il y a l'argent. Et c'est là encore où il y a des problèmes. (MAEP#7, 21/11/2017)

Page 171 :

Les nouvelles technologies sont toujours acquises par la hiérarchie. La hiérarchie nous informe, par exemple, par la recherche [coton]... c'est eux qui nous donnent les notions et à notre tour maintenant on fait le partage en milieu paysan. (MAEP#3, 07/02/2018)

Je suis dans le cadre des activités de l'État... il faut que les patrons décident et nous on nous envoie un peu ce qui est décidé en fait. (INRAB#8, 22/05/2018)

Page 230 :

Dans la Donga, on fait le coton seulement pour les engrais... ça donne pas ici, tout le monde sait ça (CF#15, 28/11/2017)

On peut pas manger le coton. (CF#8, 08/02/2018)

On fait le coton comme si c'était une obligation. On a pas eu autre chose à faire. Si on pouvait trouver autre chose, qui dépasse le coton, on allait laisser le coton de côté... produire les produits de consommation, comme le sorgho, le maïs, et consorts. (CF#6, 07/02/2018)

A.5. Consent form and participant information sheet



UNIVERSITY
OF SUSSEX

FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT

TITRE DU PROJET : Coopération pour le Développement et l'incorporation d'arrangements institutionnels ad hoc dans le contexte local au Bénin

Référence de validation du projet : ER/AG591/1

Cochez s'il vous plaît toutes les sections qui vous sont applicables et pour lesquelles vous souhaitez donner votre consentement :

1.	J'ai lu, ou on a lu pour moi dans ma langue maternelle, et j'ai compris l'information sur ce projet, telle quelle fournie dans la fiche d'information.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Il m'a été donnée l'opportunité de poser des questions sur le projet et sur ma participation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	J'accepte volontairement l'enregistrement audio de l'entretien. Je comprends qu'il me sera donné, sous demande, la transcription contenant toute information enregistrée pour mon approbation préalable.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Je comprends que toute information que j'aurais fournie est confidentielle, et que aucune information que je partage n'entraînera l'identification d'aucun individu dans les rapports du projet, que ce soit par le chercheur ou par une autre partie.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Je comprends que ma participation est volontaire, que je peux choisir de ne pas participer en partie ou à la totalité du projet et que je peux me retirer à n'importe quel moment du projet sans être pénalisé ou défavorisé d'aucune façon.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Je consens au traitement de mes informations personnelles aux fins de cette étude. Je comprends que ces informations seront traitées comme strictement confidentielles et traitées conformément à la loi de 1998 sur la protection des données.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	J'accepte volontairement de participer au projet de recherche mentionné ci-dessus.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant

Nom, Prénom :

Signature :

Date :

Chercheur

Nom, Prénom :

Signature :

Date :



FICHE D'INFORMATION POUR LE PARTICIPANT

**MÉMOIRE INSTITUTIONNELLE DE LA COOPÉRATION POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT
DANS LE SECTEUR DU COTON AU BÉNIN**

Vous avez été invité à participer de cette recherche qui est menée dans le cadre du programme de Doctorat de l'Institut d'Études du Développement de l'Université de Sussex, Angleterre. Avant de décider si vous prenez part ou non, il est important de comprendre les objectifs de cette recherche et ce qu'elle impliquera. S'il vous plaît, prenez le temps de lire avec attention les informations suivantes.

QUEL EST L'OBJECTIF DE L'ÉTUDE ?

Cette étude est menée dans le cadre du programme de doctorat de l'Institut d'Études du Développement de l'Université de Sussex, Angleterre. La recherche de terrain a lieu au Bénin, d'octobre 2017 à juillet 2018.

L'objectif de recherche est d'étudier la mémoire institutionnelle de la coopération internationale au Bénin dans le secteur du coton et ainsi comprendre comment les expériences passées et les connections historiques entre les pays partenaires façonnent les programmes de développement.

SUIS-JE OBLIGÉ DE PARTICIPER ?

La participation est entièrement volontaire et vous pouvez annuler votre participation à n'importe quel moment, même après avoir accepté de participer.

MES INFORMATIONS SERONT CONFIDENTIELLES ?

Oui. Dans cette recherche l'anonymat et la confidentialité des participants seront respectées rigoureusement. Toute donnée collectée sera traitée avec confidentialité et jamais accessible à des tiers. Nous garantissons que toute information fournie sera anonyme.

QUI A APPROUVÉ CETTE ÉTUDE ?

Le plan de l'étude a été approuvé par des chercheurs de l'Institut d'Études du Développement en Mai 2017 et les considérations éthiques par le *Research Ethics Committee* de l'Université de Sussex.

CONTACT POUR PLUS D'INFORMATION

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Si vous avez des doutes sur la façon dont l'étude est conduite, vous pouvez contacter les directeurs de cette recherche :

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j.allouche@ids.ac.uk
Dr. Alex Shankland, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex,
a.shankland@ids.ac.uk

L'Université de Sussex a une assurance en place pour couvrir les passifs légaux liés à cette étude.

A.6. List of cotton projects in Benin (1960–2018)

Table 10: Complete list of cotton projects in Benin from 1960 to 2018

PERIOD OF IMPLEMENTATION	PROJECT TITLE	DONOR/ PROVIDER
1963–1969	Cotton Development Project	France
1972–1977	Zou-Borgou Cotton Project (ZBCP)	World Bank (+France)
1977–1982	Technical Assistance Project (WB-TAP)	World Bank (+France)
1981–1988	Borgou Province Rural Development Project (BPRDP)	World Bank (+IFAD)
1982–1992	Zou Province Rural Development Project (ZPRDP)	World Bank (+France)
1988–1993	Borgou Province Rural Development Project II (BPRDP II)	World Bank (+France, IFAD, BAD)
1996–2000	Support to Agricultural Research Project (PARAB)	France
1998–2005	Benin Organic Cotton Project (BOCP)	Netherlands
1998–2005	Farming Systems Improvement and Diversification Programme (PADSE)	France
2001–2006	Cotton Research Support Project (PARCOB)	France
2003–2008	Cotton Sector Reform (PARFC)	World Bank
2004–2009	Support for the Cotton Sector Reform Project (PARSC)	France
2006–2010	Cotton Made in Africa (CmiA)	Germany
2006–2013	Cotton Producers Organisations Strengthening Programme (PROCOTON)	Netherlands + SNV
2006–2009	Cotton Sector Competitiveness Enhancement	Netherlands + IFDC
2006–2013	West African Cotton Improvement Programme (WACIP)	United States USAID + IFDC
2007–2011	Integrated Production and Pest Management (GIPD)	FAO (EU funding)
2007–2013	Support for Textile Cotton Sector Project (PAFICOT)	AfDB
2009–2013	Support to Cotton Sector in C4 Countries (C4-Brazil)	Brazil
2009–2012	Competitive African Cotton Initiative (COMPACI)	Germany
2011–2014	Cotton and Organic Cotton around Protected Areas (CAP Bio)	Switzerland (Helvetas)
2012–2017	Support to Cotton Production in Benin	China
2012–2017	Cotton Technical Assistance Programme for Africa (TAP Cotton)	India
2013–2015	COMPACI phase II	Germany
2013–2015	Cotton Farming Project	Turkey
2013–2015	Integrated Management of Cotton Pests (GIRCOT)	CORAF
2014–2017	CAP Bio II	Switzerland (Helvetas)
2014–2018	Four Country Cotton Partnership (C4CP)	United States USAID + IFDC
2014–2018	Technological Strengthening and Dissemination of Good Agricultural Practices for Cotton in C4 Countries and Togo (C4+Togo)	Brazil
2015–2016	Technical Innovations and Africanisation of Cotton Farming Sustainability Indicators (ITK Aid-coton)	France and EU
2016–2021	ProSol	Germany
2017–2019	Support to Agro-ecological Transition in Cotton Producing Areas (IAZCO)	France

A.7. The current mechanisms and functioning of the cotton sector

A.7.1. Growers' organisations and their pragmatic relationship with cotton

Although more than 160,000 farmers grew cotton in 2018, only a few of them had it as their preferred crop. Especially in the regions where the yields are not high enough to ensure profitability, it appeared from interviews and observations I carried out in the field that the main – and often the only – reason farmers grow cotton is to join the input supply system, which enables them to buy agrochemicals on credit and increase their production of food crops. For example, in the Donga department, the climate is favourable to a diversity of crops. Thus, farmers can grow a larger range of vegetables and fruit, both cash and subsistence crops. However, they still opt for growing cotton to have access to fertilisers on credit, in spite of the disadvantageous climate for cotton farming. In Bassila, a district of the Donga, cotton yields have been below national average for the past ten years (AIC, 2017). In that region, cotton is clearly not a profitable business. In November 2017, I visited a cotton field in which a farmer conducted experiments for the Cotton Research Centre (CRA-CF). In face of the poor results of his plot, embarrassed in front of the researchers, he explicitly said that ‘in the Donga, we only grow cotton for the fertilisers. It is not worth it otherwise, everybody knows that’.¹²¹

This pragmatic connection with cotton is equally observable in the northern departments, where cotton yields and profitability are higher. In the Alibori and Atacora departments, the popularity of the crop is due to the favourable rainfall regime for cotton farming. Yet cotton is rarely the only crop and a pragmatic attitude prevails. A successful cotton grower in the district of Kérou explained: ‘[without cotton] it would be difficult to grow maize, because it is hard to find fertilisers otherwise’. By extension, if farmers had an option, they would opt out of the cotton industry and grow other crops, because the ‘work in the cotton fields is too hard’, and ‘we cannot eat cotton’,¹²² after all. A grower put it bluntly: ‘we grow cotton as if it were an obligation... We do not have anything else to do... If we could find something else that tops cotton, we would leave cotton aside... and produce subsistence crops instead, like maize, sorghum’.¹²³

¹²¹ CF#15, 28/11/2017.

¹²² CF#8, 08/02/2018.

¹²³ CF#6, 07/02/2018.

Food crops also constitute a source of income for farmers, but the market is much more uncertain. The price of food crops oscillates throughout the year according to national levels of supply and demand. The price of maize, for example, can vary by a factor of three within a few months: in the period following the harvest, from August until November, the price is usually very low – around 8,000 CFA Francs for a bale of 120kg. In July, the same quantity of maize can reach 24,000 CFA Francs and is barely sold by farmers, since most of them, by that time, have already traded their reserves to the merchants with storage facilities. By contrast, cotton is the only crop that has its purchase price guaranteed regardless of market fluctuations. The government fixes the purchase price at the beginning of the cropping season, in April. The price announced two months before the seeding period is then guaranteed until the end of the cropping season in February/March of the following year. The functioning of this system rests upon the structured organisation of cotton growers in cooperatives.

‘The decision [to create cooperatives] came from the top’,¹²⁴ remembered an elderly grower. The cooperative system has taken different names throughout the years, but the principles remained the same in 2018. The ensemble of village cooperatives (CVPC, *Coopérative Villageoise des Producteurs de Coton*) forms, at the district level, the U-Com-CVPC, or *Union Communale des Coopératives Villageoises de Producteurs de Coton*. The U-Coms play a determining role in the organisation of the sector. They are responsible for the distribution of inputs (seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, and herbicides), for organising the collection of cotton in the fields, and managing the bureaucracy related to payments, taxes, and debts. At the departmental level, the U-Coms of a given department come together in the UD-CVPC (*Union Départementale des Coopératives Villageoises de Producteurs de Coton*). Finally, at the national level, the cotton growers have their own national federation, assembling all the Departmental Unions: the FN-CVPC (*Fédération Nationale des Coopératives Villageoises de Producteurs de Coton*). In each of these levels, from the district to the national, the groups are headed by a president, who is elected in a general assembly, and is assisted by administrative staff, such as a secretary, an inputs supply officer, a treasurer, and so on – all of them are generally also cotton growers.

¹²⁴ CF#6, 07/02/2018.

As I show in the next section and in chapters above, the voice and interests of cotton growers lack a consistent channel from the fields and village cooperatives in the north to the offices in Cotonou, where decisions are made, despite having a structured, hierarchical organisation.

A.7.2. The input supply system

The cotton sector is the most organised agricultural sector in Benin, in particular because of the input supply system. The credit system has been a worldwide incentive in the cotton industry since the eighteenth century (see Beckert, 2015). The premise that led to the establishment of the system – that farmers cannot afford the factors of production (seeds and agrochemicals) – still prevails in Benin.

Before the planting season, each farmer indicates to their cooperative how many hectares of cotton they intend to plant that year. The CVPC's Chargé d'Intrants gathers the data from every member of the cooperative and estimates the total requirement of agrochemicals, based on the official technical itinerary. The information is then transferred to the U-Com. At the level of the U-Com, an AIC representative is responsible for gathering the forms and transferring them to the Departmental Union and National Federation. At the national level, the overall demand for inputs is estimated. Based on the demand, the Ministry of Agriculture opens a call for tenders for the supply of agrochemicals, to which accredited importers can submit their offer.

In this trade, the ginners stand as guarantors. At the beginning of the cropping season, the AIC allocates a share of the estimated total production of seed cotton to each ginnery. The quota determines how much seed cotton each ginnery will buy and process in a given cropping season. The ginners transfer to the AIC the equivalent of 40 per cent of the total value of their share. With this advance, the AIC pays the input suppliers and organises the distribution of products in the U-Coms. From that point, the farmers themselves come to collect their boxes that they bring back to the village cooperatives and distribute among members according to their cultivated area. The timely and effective distribution of agrochemicals is one of the major determinants of the success of a cropping season. It enables growers to seed their fields early, increasing the chances that the plant will grow during the rainy season.

After the harvest, the AIC organises the collection of seed cotton in the fields. Each village cooperative informs the U-Com and AIC representative that they have seed cotton harvested waiting in the fields. The AIC releases a removal order and sends a truck to collect the cotton

in the village. Once the truck is loaded, the cotton is sent to the designated ginnery. Until the weighing, the cotton still belongs to the farmer, who has to bear all the risks and responsibility for his product, even though he has little or no capacity to supervise the process.

Figure 17: Collection of chemical fertilisers at the U-Com CVPC of Kérou



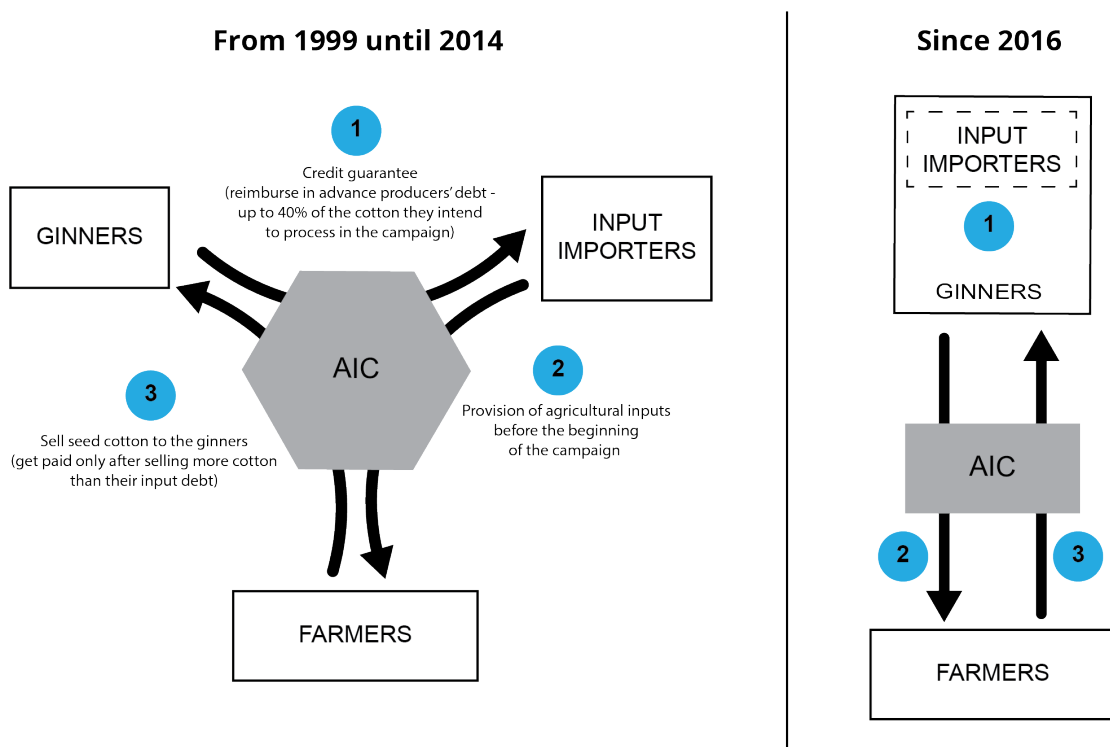
At the weighbridge, an AIC staff member inspects the quality of the cotton, determines whether it is first choice or second choice, and calculates the total value of the load. The ginner only pays the farmer through the AIC if the value of the farmer's load exceeds the farmer's debt. Once a farmer's cooperative has provided enough seed cotton to repay the collective debt, the ginner pays the cooperative through the AIC. The U-Com finally distributes payments to village cooperatives, and the village cooperative distributes them to growers, according to the surplus of their individual output over their debt.

In the ginneries, the machines separate the seed from the cotton bowl, and compress the cotton into bales. The bales of cotton pile up in warehouses before leaving the country through the Port of Cotonou. India and China are the main buyers of Beninese cotton, and also the main trade partners. If the government fixes the purchase price of seed cotton, the ginneries sell cotton lint at the international market rate, which oscillates according to cycles, trends, and policies decided far away from the fields of northern Benin. Yet growers are the ones who support the fall in prices in the international market. Despite the price-fixing by the government before the beginning of the cropping season, when the price in the international market falls, ginneries pressure the authorities to reduce it. The growers who decided to grow cotton in May, expecting to sell the outputs at a guaranteed price, can see their earnings decrease drastically at the moment of commercialisation. On these occasions,

thousands of farmers are unable to pay off their debts and the promise of the white gold becomes a burden to carry for many years.

The principle of the input supply system has changed little over the years: the timely provision of inputs to farmers. The role played by the AIC has changed over the years, however. Its creation was motivated by the need to organise the sector following the arrival of competitors in the input supply and ginnery markets. As such, the Association concentrated the flow between ginneries, input importers, and farmers, as presented in the figure below. Since 2016 and its reestablishment, the input importers retracted from the Association, which became composed by ginneries and farmers alone. This corresponds to the emergence of a monopsony and monopoly in the cotton sector. Indeed, Talon's ginneries are the only ones able to buy cotton in advance, and his companies also provide the inputs. As a result, there has almost been a merger between input importers and ginneries, and the AIC gained importance in the interfaces with farmers via its role in rural extension services, distribution of inputs, and collection of seed cotton, while it lost its coordination role.

Figure 18: The functioning of the input supply system



The input supply system functions alongside the rules of cotton farming. The quantity of fertilisers a farmer needs is defined by a precise technical itinerary that farmers follow in an attempt to reach the production levels stipulated. Such is the object of the next section.

A.7.3. The Technical Itinerary and the definition of agricultural practices

The Technical Itinerary (ITK) provides the guidelines for producing cotton. The ITK is an official document released every year that prescribes the agronomical aspects of cotton farming. The elaboration of the document starts at the INRAB's Cotton Research Centre (CRA-CF). CRA-CF agronomists conduct regular experiments in different agroecological zones. They test varieties of cotton, combinations of different fertilisers, and diverse pest management techniques. Based on the results of several years of continuous research, the CRA-CF proposes changes in the ITK. Then, the INRAB, the AIC, and government officials discuss the proposal at the Direction of Agriculture in the MAEP. Thereafter, new guidelines are compiled in a document that is circulated to all Rural Development Managers (RDR), who sit at each of the departments' prefectures, and have the MAEP as line ministry. RDRs oversee agricultural production and organise rural extension services, deployed by the CARDERs. Rural extension agents receive training on the new guidelines and instruct their group of farmers. The instructions in the ITK are crucial for the profitability of cotton farming, because the itinerary stipulates the quantity of agrochemicals per hectare that farmers need to buy on credit. The ITK also informs about the best sowing periods in the different regions and on how to proceed with pest treatments.

Table 11: Main features of the Technical Itinerary for the cropping season 2018/19

MACRO PRODUCING AREAS	SOWING PERIOD	CHEMICAL FERTILISERS <i>(quantity per hectare)</i>	PEST MANAGEMENT
Alibori and Atacora	20 May to 20 June	250kg NPK + 50kg Urea	7 applications (one every fortnight)
Borgou and Donga	10 June to 5 July	250kg NPK + 50kg Urea	7 applications (one every fortnight)
Others	25 June to 15 July	200kg NPK + 50kg Urea	7 applications (one every fortnight)

The AIC estimates that the total production cost related to agrochemicals (including fertilisers, herbicides, and pesticides) should not exceed 40 per cent of the predicted earnings of a given farm. However, if a farmer observed the dosages of agrochemicals stipulated in the ITK in 2018, the cost of inputs per hectare could reach 46 per cent of his potential earnings, based on the national average yield of 1.1 tonne per hectare. In fact, expenditure on agrochemicals is generally higher. This is because, in many cases, cotton growers order more agrochemicals than they need in their cotton fields in order to use them for food crops. Gergely (2009) estimates that approximately 10 per cent of fertilisers bought via the cotton supply system is diverted to subsistence crops.

Decision makers in Cotonou thoroughly discuss the changes they intend to apply in the ITK. Cotton growers are indirectly represented in the discussions, since they are represented at the AIC alongside ginners. In turn, the AIC represents all actors of the sector in the discussions at the MAEP's Direction of Agriculture. This is an arena in which international development partners have no direct influence, since donors and providers are not represented in the meetings. Nonetheless, the ITK remains the main instrument of diffusion of and change in agricultural practices in cotton farming.

In recent years, the major change has been the introduction of new varieties that are better adapted to the different producing areas. However, the quantity of agrochemicals (NPK + Urea) advised in the ITK has constantly increased throughout the years: it went from 100 kilograms per hectare in the 1980s, to 200 kilograms in the 1990s, then to 210 kilograms in 2009 (Gergely, 2009; MAEP and INRAB CRA-CF, 2018; World Bank, 1981). In 2017, the recommended dosages of agrochemicals increased to 300 kilograms per hectare. These changes match the interests of input importers in expanding their market. Conversely, this has a direct impact on the cost of production and potentially reduces farmers' profits if yields do not also increase.

Such increases of dosages were justified by the accelerated depletion of the soil, especially in the largest cotton-producing areas. Farmers do acknowledge that the soil is becoming less and less fertile, but their main concern remains the high cost of factors of production and the low prices paid for seed cotton. From 1998 to 2018, the price of fertilisers increased 26 per cent, while the price of seed cotton increased 17 per cent (Ouin-Ouro, 2018b; Ton, 2004). As a result, while cotton production has continuously increased throughout the years, farmers' share remained unchanged and has even decreased: in 1998, the value of an average cotton farm's output accounted for XOF 568,000, against XOF 557,000 in 2018¹²⁵ (Minot et al., 2001; Ouin-Ouro, 2018a). The transformation of farming practices has become the main object of cotton projects since 2004. Development partners see in them a way to increase rural income and alleviate poverty. But these practices carry heavy interests that lie away from farmers and projects' reach.

¹²⁵ Using a Power Purchasing Parity conversion factor, it was possible to estimate the price in constant US dollars: a single cotton farm's output went from 2,624 dollars in 1998 to 2,573 dollars in 2018.

