



Rethinking public action: lessons from policies to support small-scale producers in Côte d'Ivoire



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The starting point for this research is the gap that exists between existing support systems and their actual use by small-scale farmers in Côte d'Ivoire.

The general aim of the thesis is therefore to understand the paradox between the available systems and the use made of them by small-scale agricultural producers (SPAs). The aim is to understand how public support for farmers can exist, but be ineffective because it is ill-adapted to poorly trained, poorly structured SAGs, who are part of highly informal frameworks that prevent them from accessing financial and non-financial services, and from appropriating existing support.

The thesis shows that such a situation can be found in several regions and within several agricultural value chains. The generality of such an observation and the detailed understanding of its determinants (typology of producers, modes of organization, types of financing, perception of existing systems) has enabled us to draw up a set of recommendations as to how to think differently about support and aid for APPs.

In addition to the importance of the results for the agricultural sector and the social and solidarity economy, the contribution and impact of the thesis also stems from the decisive weight of agriculture in an economy like Côte d'Ivoire's: 73% of the rural population and a quarter of its GDP (World Bank, 2020).

Faced with increasingly globalized trade, African farmers are finding it hard to adjust to Western production standards, just as governments are finding it hard to define appropriate agricultural policies that take account of African realities. Deregulation has brought small-scale producers into direct contact with the market, committing them to risky forms of contractualization in the face of prices over which they have no control.

In such contexts, while the weight and resilience of informal economies and organizations are sometimes highlighted by certain authors, it is clear that the reforms undertaken have had disastrous effects, and that the absence of a formal production framework is actually hampering performance and hampering development. For example, while the global average yield of cashew nuts is estimated at 1.3 tons/ha (Ndiaye et al., 2021), it is only half that (0.4-0.5t/ha) in Côte d'Ivoire (Ruf et al., 2019), due to the highly atomized nature of APPs.

Improving the performance of the agricultural sector and the ability to develop local commodity chains such as Cashew and Cassava are therefore proving structurally decisive in enabling African countries to effectively withstand exogenous shocks and reduce their deficits.

Research impact(s)

The results of the thesis underline the handicaps that the lack of a formalized organization represents for PPPs, on the one hand, and the absence of adequate support mechanisms, on the other.

In the first case, the legal framework would need to be reformed, to enable PPAs, for example, to set themselves up easily as Groupements agricoles d'exploitation en commun. As one respondent put it: "For us, the only solution is to form an organization, a cooperative. That's the only way we can deal more effectively with our business partners". In the agricultural sector, contractual agreements between farmers and companies in a production or distribution chain enable farmers to increase their income and employment. Contracts can only be reliable and viable with PPAs set up as formal organizations.

In the second case, providing money and technology is not enough. The leader of a group of small-scale producers had this to say about the actions of state institutions: "We're not their priority. We are not included in their planning, and the agricultural investment program is not aimed at us". What's needed, then, are structural reforms of the entire ecosystem, with reliable mechanisms to support and accompany FPPs, to advise, guide, supervise and train them, and to help them better self-organize and structure themselves.

In conclusion, the thesis leads to a number of recommendations, on different fronts likely to have a significant impact on the economy of FPPs.

In terms of public aid, it calls for a more focused approach to interventions with small-scale agricultural producers, and for improved policies and funding, incorporating incentive laws based on the social and solidarity-based economy that characterizes these producers.

In terms of action, it encourages the development and implementation of integrated support systems, in the form of a service platform offering comprehensive solutions (advice, training, information, etc.) for a participative and inclusive transformation of the players in the agricultural world.

Research foundations

The analytical framework of the thesis drew on existing work on small-scale agricultural producers, in Africa and worldwide (typology of organizations, assets and constraints, identified needs, nature of corresponding agricultural policies in West Africa). The construction and interpretation of the findings were also based on several theoretical approaches. Structuration theory (Giddens, 1987) shed light on how organizational forms are at the heart of actors' performance.

Convention theory (Lewis, 1969; Schelling, 1980; Schotter, 1981, Rallet, 1993) has shed light on the importance of formalization in guaranteeing commitment to modes of contractualization. Lastly, a functionalist approach (Malinowski, 1944) helped to clarify the social function of small producers' access or lack of access to financial and non-financial services.

Methodology

The development of the thesis was based on a hybrid methodology, combining interviews, observations, fieldwork and qualitative and quantitative approaches. The variety of the material used enabled us to triangulate the findings and provide a relatively complete picture of PPPs. More specifically, the work was based on a comparison of two types of agricultural production, cassava and cashew nuts, in two different departments of Côte d'Ivoire.

The research first drew on the author's extensive knowledge and experience in supporting agricultural programs. It then drew on documentary research and a qualitative approach using interview guides to gather information from fifteen key informants, namely the Entreprises de prestation de Services aux Organisations de Producteurs (ESOPs), ten institutional players (Regulator, State), and nine leaders of small-scale cashew and cassava farmers. Finally, the thesis employed a quantitative approach, based on questionnaire data collected from 209 small-scale cashew and cassava farmers.

The data collected was used firstly to provide comparative descriptive statistics for each type of production, and secondly to carry out a systematic content analysis using Sphinx iQ2 processing software.

To go further...

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