

Functional Characteristics of Cooperatives from the Perspective of Social Justice: Case Study of Village Cotton Producers Cooperatives in the Department of Alibori, Benin

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Abstract: *Producer organizations are an effective way to empower small producers. Since 2013, the 9th Uniform Act of OHADA relating to the law of Cooperative Societies initiated structural and functional changes in producer organizations area. This article aims to characterize the producer organizations encountered in the Beninese agricultural sector, through the case study of the Village Cooperatives of Cotton Producers (CVPC) selected in the 6 municipalities of the department of Alibori, northern part of Benin Republic. Primary data were collected from 242 CVPC on socio-economic characteristics and functional characteristics relating to perceptions of social justice (distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice). Multiple component analysis (MCA) was used to characterize the CVPCs surveyed. The results showed that the department of Alibori has four categories of CVPC which are; (i) -CVPCs which have low size, low distributive justice and interactional justice but high procedural justice (40.9%); (ii) - CVPCs which have high size, high distributive and interactional justice and a low procedural justice (16.11%); (iii) - CVPCs which have average distributive and interactional justice (18.6%); and (iv) CVPC which have low interactional and distributive justice (55%). These results suggest that CVPCs size is the main socio-economic characteristic used to differentiate CVPCs; beside the functional characteristics of perceptions of distributive justice, interactional justice, and procedural justice within CVPCs.*

Keywords: Perception of social justice, Cotton producer cooperatives, Organizational development, collective action, Benin

1. Introduction

Producer organizations are an effective means of empowering small producers by helping them build their capacities to formulate and defend their needs and concerns before other economic actors and policy makers (Herbel et al., 2013). According to Develtere (1994), the cooperative model is a transmission from outside agencies, first and foremost the colonial authorities. In Benin, during the first three decades after independence, these organizations functioned as structures which were appendages of the state (Magha, 2010; Mercoiret, 2006). In this position, producer organizations have been largely controlled by public authorities. But the advent of the liberalization process in 1990 led to a sufficient managerial autonomy for these organizations. Unfortunately, poor governance resulted from the (new) leaders not much prepared. Poor governance also affected the expression of social justice aspect within producer organizations in general, and cotton cooperatives in particular (MAEP, 2007; Wennink et al., 2013).

Producers were organized and continue today, gradually adapting to the new national and international context (Harlander and Peyron, 2002). Currently, the 9th Uniform Act of Cooperative Societies of OHADA adopted on May 15, 2011, which came into force on May 15, 2013, underpins the organization of producers. The 9th Uniform Act of OHADA Cooperative Societies sets the objective of standardizing cooperative law in the OHADA area (an area made up of seventeen States Parties in West and Central Africa, including Benin) in a prospect of improving the legal environment and economic development (Gning and Larue, 2014). The 9th Uniform Act of OHADA is a

framework for the promotion of good governance and the expression of justice which aims, among other things, better application of cooperative principles. Also, it initiated changes in the organization and structure of producer organizations (Soule Alassane Manne, 2017). Therefore, producer organizations must improve their capacity to mobilize resources for their functional needs.

After about six years of practice of the 9th Uniform Act of OHADA, the questions relating to its effects on producer organizations in terms of governance performance, expression of social justice and typology for sustainable interventions remain poorly addressed. This article aims to provide a typology of producer organizations encountered in the Beninese agricultural sector, with the Village Cooperatives of Cotton Producers (CVPC) as a case study. Cotton sector was the first targeted in the framework of compliance with the 9th Uniform Act of OHADA. This is due to the fact that the cotton sector generates the largest share of foreign exchange estimated at 38.7% of Benin's export earnings in 2013 (MEF, 2013). However, the poor governance from cotton producer organizations has strongly affected the cohesion of producers. Many internal conflicts are reported concerning the failure to respect democratic principles of leadership. The lack of transparency in the management of the group's resources, the inequitable access to inputs due to favoritism for certain members and managers were common injustice practices. The 9th Uniform Act of OHADA is seen as a relevant solution to improve the governance performance system of CVPCs as well as that of the entire sector. Consequently, the supervisory staff of the agricultural sector carried out

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activities in order to get the law known and adopted for a proper application.

Our reading reviews reveal a sparse literature on the typology of producer organizations such as CVPCs in the cotton sector. The existing literature generally emerges on the one hand from the diversity of forms of rural organization without considering a specific agricultural sector (Bosc et al., 2002; Mercoiret, 2006; Wey et al., 2007). On the other hand, studies identified the types of production systems according to the agricultural sector considered (Adjobo et al., 2020; Azonkpin et al., 2018). Indeed, Azonkpin et al., (2018) addressed the typology of organic cotton production while (Adjobo et al., 2020; Sero et al., 2020) addressed the typology of cashew production system.

The particularity of this article is to highlight not only the socio-economic characteristics of CVPC namely the size in this case, but also the functional characteristics in terms of the perceptions of the cooperators on social justice practices within their group. The theory of social justice defends a society based on redistributive justice that would reduce inequalities. The different types of social justice are distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice. Distributive justice is defined as the perceived justice of retributions or resources. Procedural justice concerns the process of allocating compensation to individuals (the procedures implemented to make a managerial decision). Interactional justice is defined as the quality of interpersonal treatment received during the promulgation and implementation of organizational procedures (Barraud-Didier et al., 2015; Frimousse et al., 2008; Janiczek et al., 2012).

The results of this article will allow decision-makers to take into account the features of CVPCs in order to design better interventions targeting them, all of which contribute to the promotion of good governance within CVPCs. The following sections of the article present the methodological framework, the results, the discussions and the conclusion.

2. Methodological Framework

Study Area

The survey was carried out in the Alibori department in northeastern Benin, located between 11 ° 19' North latitude and 2 ° 55' East longitude. It is bounded to the north by the Republic of Niger, to the north-west by the Republic of Burkina Faso, to the east by the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to the west by Atacora and to the south by the department of Borgou. Covering an area of 26, 242 km² (23% of the national territory), Alibori is subdivided into six (6) municipalities which are: Malanville, Karimama, Ségbana, Gogounou, Banikoara and Kandi. The climate is changing, from the Sudanese type in its southern part to the Sudano-Sahelian type in its northern part (Karimama - Malanville). It only experiences one rainy season that lasts 5 to 6 months with rainfall oscillating between 700 mm and 1, 200 mm (DDAEP Report, 2018). The dominant soils are of 3 types: ferruginous soils on a crystalline base; the very fertile alluvial soils of the Niger valley; and the clayey, silty

black soils of very fertile lowlands, swamps and gallery forest, where rice cultivation, market gardening and yam cultivation take place.

Industrial agriculture in this zone focuses on cotton, with the department's production volume exceeding half of national production; which makes this department the main cotton basin of Benin. The six municipalities were considered for this study. According to (AIC, 2017), the department of Alibori produces nearly 50% of the national cotton production and accounts for about 25% of the total national workforce of Village Cotton Producers Cooperatives.

Figure 1 shows the map of the study area.

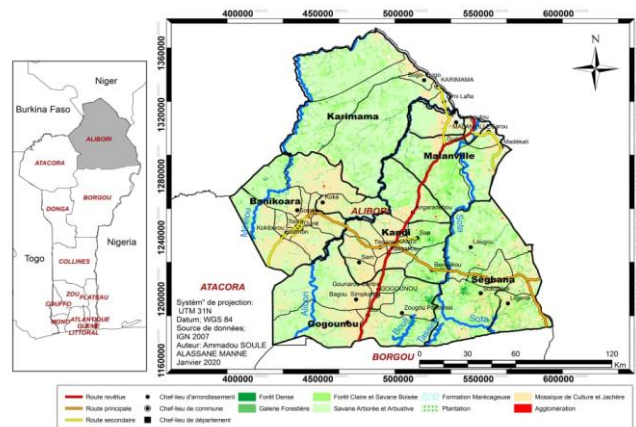


Figure 1: The map of the study area

Sample and data collection

In total, the department of Alibori has 642 CVPC spread over 6 municipalities. The formula of Dagnelie (1998) was used to determine the minimum sample size. This formula is written as follows.

$$n = \frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{e^2} \div \left(1 + \left(\frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{e^2 N} \right) \right)$$

Where:

N = 642: size of the population,

e = margin of error, which is e = 0.05

z = z-score, z-score is the number of standard deviations of a given proportion from the mean, which gives 1.96 for the 95% confidence interval considered;

p = 0.5 was considered for the value of cotton production in Alibori department which accounts for at least half of national production.

The minimum sample size found is equal to n = 242. The proportionality criteria were applied to determine the number of CVPCs surveyed per municipality, i.e. the

municipalities with a greater number of CVPCs are represented in a higher proportion, but equivalent to its weight. The choice of nominative villages was made randomly on the basis of the list of all CVPC obtained from the Interprofessional Cotton Association (AIC). Table 1 shows the distribution of the number of CVPC surveyed by municipality.

Table 1: Number of CVPC surveyed per municipality

Municipalities	Number of CVPCs surveyed
Banikoara	86
Kandi	72
Gogounou	30
Karimama	7
Ségbana	18
Malanville	29
Total	242

Source: Authors

Primary data were collected on the basis of a structured questionnaire sent to CVPCs during focus groups during which on average 3-6 representatives of CVPC members, i.e. at least 1-2 managers, in the form of a participatory evaluation. The secondary data were obtained thanks to the documentary review carried out throughout the research. The data collected are: Size or number of CVPC, Age, Number of women, Profile of leaders, perceptions of different types of social justice (distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice). The data on the different types of social justice (distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice) come from the combination of the different items concerning the elements described.

Table 2: Description of data collected

Variables	Description
Size	Membership of CVPC
Age	The lifespan of the CVPC in relation to the period of creation
Gender in CVPC	Number of women in CVPC in terms of their representation in number equal to at least 1/3 or not
Profile of leaders	% of educated leaders in CVPCs (three cases: less 50% can read and write for low profile, about 50% can read and write for average profile, and more than 50% can read and write for high profile)
Distributive justice	Perception of the distribution of services offered to members in terms of equality, equity and according to need
Procedural justice	Perception of members in relation to the application of procedure, neutrality, representativeness for inviting and participating in meetings and decision-making inherent in the life and governance of cooperatives
Interactional justice	Perception of members in relation to their recognition in the CVPC, their relative autonomy and defense, and the autonomy of the cooperative vis-à-vis the administration

Source: Authors

Data analysis

Multiple component analysis (MCA) was used to categorize the CVPC surveyed. The MCA allows simultaneous

analysis of the links that could exist between all the modalities of the variables considered. Multiple Correspondence Analysis is a generalization of Factor Correspondence Analysis (FCA), when the relationships between more than two qualitative variables are studied.

The rules of interpretation of the results (coordinates, CTR, COS2) concerning the active elements of an MCA are appreciably the same as those of an AFC and to choose the dimension of the projection subspace, one will use either the criterion of elbow of Cattell (separation or decrease of the 1st eigenvalues) is the criterion of Kaiser, and very often the rule of the eigenvalue higher than the average of the

$$\lambda_w \geq \frac{1}{p}$$

eigenvalues ().

3. Results

Socio-economic characteristics of CVPC

Table 3 presents the socio-economic characteristics of our study sample in terms of the size of CVPCs, their age, number of women and profile of leaders.

Table 3: Socio-economic characteristics of CVPC

Variables	Modalities	Percentage (%)
CVPC size	Low membership (less than 100 members)	64.46
	High membership (over 100 members)	35.54
Age	Period of colonial heritage: [1975; 1990[1.24
	Revolutionary period: [1975; 1990[2.07
	Period of economic liberalism:[1990; 2012]	61.57
	Standardization period related to Act Uniform of OHADA Law period):2013 et +	35.12
Gender	Low gendered (number of women equal to less than 1/3 of the total)	89.26
	High gendered (number of women equal to more than 1/3 of the total)	10.74
Profile of leaders	Low Profile	46.28
	Medium profile	40.08
	High profile	13.64

Source: Field survey, Alibori (July-October, 2019)

From the analysis of the table, it emerges that in our survey sample the CVPCs are mostly large with a percentage of 64.46%; whereas, the large number of these CVPCs were created in the interval of [1990; 2013] with a percentage of 61.57% against 35.12%, 2.07% and 1.24% of CVPCs which respectively emerged in 2013 and +, between [1975; 1990 [, and in the pre-revolutionary period. The number of women is mostly low in most of CVPCs (with a percentage of 89.26 %). The majority of CVPCs have a low leader profile with a percentage of 46.28% against respectively 40.08% and 13.64% for CVPC with medium and high leader profiles.

Functional characteristics of CVPCs

Table 4 summarizes the functional characteristics relating to distributive justice, interactional justice and procedural justice in the sampled CVPCs.

Table 4: Functional characteristics of CVPCs

Variables	Modalities (description)	Percentage (%)
Distributive Justice	Low (Low. Just. Dist.)	67.10 12, 85 67, 10
	Average (Medium. Just. Dist.)	12.85
	High (High Just. Dist.)	20.05
Procedural Justice	Low (Low. Just. Proc.)	41.24
	Average (Medium. Just. Proc.)	31.65
	High (High. Just. Proc.)	27.11
Interactional Justice	Low (Low. Just. Inter.)	60.33
	Average (Medium Just. Inter.)	17.91
	High (High Just. Inter.)	21.76

Source: Field survey, Alibori (July-October, 2019)

The global analysis of our table reveals that CVPCs with low distributive justice are more represented in our study sample with a percentage of 67.10%. This is due to the high perceptions among cooperators that the distribution of service offers to members according to their needs is not done in a selfless manner. There is often a good share given to those responsible or their relatives. Procedural justice is characterized by weak procedural justice which takes first place with a percentage of 41.24% of CVPCs, closely followed by average procedural justice for 31.65% of CVPCs. This supports the observation made for distributive justice, and reveals that the cooperators in the majority consider that they are not involved in the processes and decision-making concerning the distribution of services, services, and other aspects related to the governance of CVPC. Interactional justice is also characterized by a weak interactional justice coming in first position for a percentage of 60.33% of CVPC. This indicates a feeling shared among several members of not being recognized on the one hand and on the other hand the heavy dependence of their CVPC on the administration.

Characterization of CVPC surveyed

The analysis of multiple correspondents made it possible to establish the link between the modalities of socio-economic characteristics and those of functional characteristics.

The histogram of the eigenvalues shows an elbow after the second eigenvalue (Figure 2); which suggests that we will retain the first two factor axes for the analyzes.

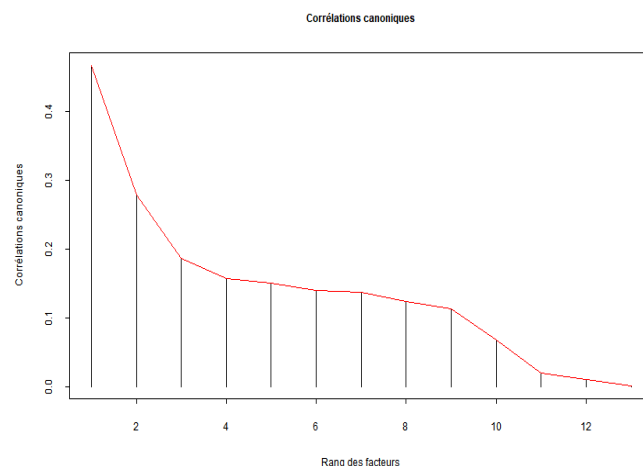


Figure 2: Histogram of eigenvalues
Source: Field survey, Alibori (July-October, 2019)

The results of the MCA are shown in Figure 3.

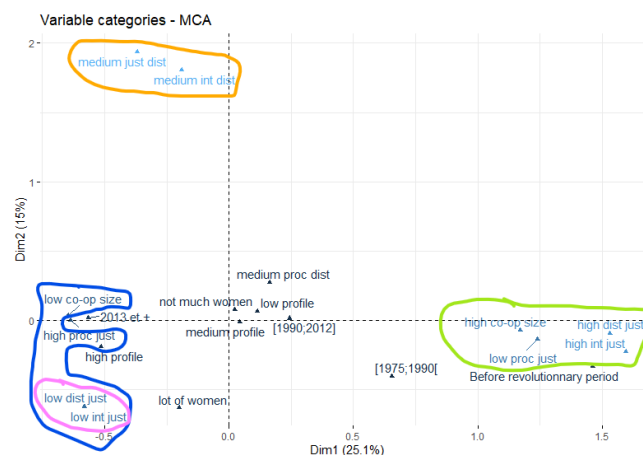


Figure 3: MCA results of CVPC typology variables

With respect to axis 1, two groups of CVPC emerge, namely:

Cooperatives which have a small size, a weak distributive justice and a weak interactional justice but a high procedural justice. They represent 99 CVPC or 40.9% of CVPC;

Cooperatives that have high membership, high distributive justice and interactional justice, and low procedural justice. This class has 39 CVPC or 16.11% of CVPC.

It can therefore be concluded that small-staffed cooperatives have high procedural justice but low distributive and interactional justice while large-staffed cooperatives have high distributive and interactional justice but low procedural justice. This indicates that perceptions of distributive good justice and interactional good justice are prevalent among large CVPCs, unlike CVPCs or small size. Thus, we understand in CVPCs with a small size, the distributions of the offers of services between the members are perceived rather unequal or even inequitable. That is to say not made according to the real needs of the members, for example the managers " attribute to themselves or to their relatives a large part of the quantities of inputs received from suppliers to the detriment of other members whose needs were however normally recorded. On the other hand, the

perceptions of good procedural justice are recorded in the CVPC with small size than in the CVPC with large staff. This is probably due to the fact that these CVPCs are more able to mobilize their members for meetings and decision making more than the large CVPCs.

Compared to axis 2, on the one hand, it combines cooperatives that have average distributive and interactional justices and, on the other, those that have low interactional and distributive justice. The first class represents 45 CVPC or 18.6% of CVPC while the second is made up of 133 CVPC or 55% of CVPC.

We can therefore conclude: The cooperatives which have a weak distributive justice generally also have a weak interactional justice while the cooperatives which have an average distributive justice generally have an average interactional justice. These different situations are in perfect harmony with reality and tend to indicate that the quality of distributive justice is the main motivation that guides the choice of membership of producers who are members of the Village Cotton Producers Cooperative. Thus, producers prefer cooperatives in which the quality of the expression of distributive justice is good.

Thus, four CVPC groups stand out among the CVPC surveyed in Alibori department. The CVPC size variable is the main socio-economic characteristics used to differentiate CVPCs; in addition to the variables associated with the functional characteristics of perceptions of distributive justice, interactional justice, and procedural justice in CVPC.

The expression of good distributive justice in Village Cotton Producers Cooperatives (CVPC) is characterized by the satisfaction of the cooperators in terms of their various input needs and the payment of their cotton funds on time and on time. Amounts actually due. These are cooperatives that are rarely the subject of cases of selling off inputs and cases of unpaid producers are non-existent or exceptional. There is a strong tendency for membership growth in these cooperatives because, given that essential services are satisfied, many cooperators admire them and are ready to go to the slightest possibility. In the event that the quality of distributive justice drops to low levels within CVPCs, complaints from producers about not meeting their needs persist. Such cooperatives are often in the throes of sell-off; hence a real coexistence between producer debtors and creditors. Those in charge of these CVPCs even pay the cooperators at rates with values lower than the official values retained as it happens that the cooperators do not receive their cotton fund at all after an entire campaign. These CVPCs are at risk of disappearing because the phenomenon of disaffection is permanent.

With regard to procedural justice, when it is good in a CVPC, there is more harmony, more understanding between the cooperators who are likely to participate in the sessions. However, it is difficult to predict the direction of cases of resignation or membership there because these movements are strongly dependent on the quality of distributive justice. Very often these are CVPCs that are small in size. On the other hand, when this justice is bad, the participation rates

in the sessions are often low and the progress of the said sessions is often marked by frequent situations of discord between co-operators, especially during decision-making. These are also CVPCs characterized by a real presence both of the phenomenon of selling off inputs in various forms and of producer creditors and debtors.

Finally, the characteristics devolved to CVPC in relation to the expression of interactional justice can be compared to those described above concerning procedural justice. The essential peculiarities are perceptible in the real motivation source of frustration and lack of mutual respect. People are frustrated to know that their voice is hardly ever taken into account during decision-making on the one hand and non-compliance with procedures on the other hand Procedural justice while the frustration of others is linked to the segregation observed in the status of cooperator in relation to each other. This situation establishes a more pronounced disrespect between members and officials in procedural justice and then between members on the one hand and between members and officials on the other hand, for interactional justice.

4. Discussion

The results of this study identified four types of CVPC among the CVPC surveyed in the Alibori department. CVPCs are categorized primarily based on variables such as the size of CVPCs and perceptions of distributive justice, interactional justice, and procedural justice. The first categories are CVPCs which have low numbers, low distributive justice and low interactional justice but high procedural justice. The second categories are CVPCs which have high membership, high distributive and interactional justice, and low procedural justice. It should be noted that the size of the majority of CVPC surveyed (64.46%) is considered small (less than 100 members). This trend is explained by the role within the 9th Uniform Act of OHADA of the rights of cooperative societies which sets at a minimum number of 7 the number of members required to form a cooperative (Soule Alassane Manne, 2017). The idea is to lighten these cooperatives as well as promote their healthier and more transparent management. However, the influence of the size of CVPCs on perceptions of distributive justice, interactional justice and procedural justice, as elements of CVPC performance, varies according to the dimension of social justice considered. This corroborates theoretical studies that have demonstrated the importance of group size and the group boundary for the success of collective actions (Jimmy and Moumouni, 2015; Olson, 1965; Ostrom, 1992).

The beneficial effects of height are also discussed under various aspects in the literature and to a large extent; the conclusions converge on the improvement of performance with increasing height. Thus, Kremp and Tessier, (2006) establish that large organizations (1000 employees and more) have a greater ability to innovate while Temperman et al. (2009) have concluded that size has a beneficial effect on the performance of learners. In the same perspective, Pavitt, (1998) concludes that collective performances are better as the size of the group increases. Shaw (1981) deduced that the capacity of organizations to gather large

quantities of information is linked to their large size. The results of the work of Ringelman (1913) quoted by (Abrami, 1995) showed that the more the number of people increases within an organization, the less the efforts of each one will be important. Cerveira and Midler, (2017), on the other hand, demonstrate a weakness in innovating, and therefore in performing, for organizations of intermediate size. In addition, we must point out the nuance of Marwell (1970) who highlights that a minimum size is required for collective action to be crowned with success.

5. Conclusion

The present study consisted in characterizing the village cooperatives of cotton producers (CVPC) in the Alibori department in Benin, in the context of the OHADA Uniform Act. This study provided scientific knowledge on the typology of CVPCs in Benin. Four categories of CVPC have been identified. CVPCs are categorized primarily based on variables such as the size of CVPCs and perceptions of distributive justice, interactional justice, and procedural justice. The first category is CVPCs which have low membership, distributive justice and low interactional justice but high procedural justice. The second category is CVPCs which have high membership, high distributive and interactional justice, and low procedural justice. The third category is made up of CVPCs which have average distributive and interactional justices while the fourth category represents CVPCs which have low interactional and distributive justices. The results suggest the cost of taking into account the size of CVPCs to ensure effective collective actions with satisfactory social justice practices within CVPCs.

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