

Review of: "A Socio-Historical Look at Agricultural Policy Reform in Benin (West Africa) since 1960: A Literature Review"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

My interest in this publication originates from my job in Benin from 1985 till 1996, posted as an agronomist at IITA (International Institute of Tropical Agriculture), working with Benin scientists from DRA (Direction de Recherche Agronomique, nowadays INRAB). I was involved in doing experimentation with farmers in their own fields, hence outside the research station. Therefore it was also often in cooperation with the CARDER of the provinces where the experimentation took place.

My observations on the article can be summarized as follows:

(NB: the above 2 star appreciation is for the publication without any improvement. With all suggestions my appreciation will improve up to 4 stars. More details at the end of this review)

Abstract:

In the abstract, the authors pretend to have done a critically analysis. However, in my view the analytical part concerns foremost a rather descriptive summary in 3.3 which takes about 5 % of the total text of this article (not including the reference list).

The last two sentences of the abstract are expectations, which are, however, not reflected in 3.3 or in 4, (Conclusions).

1. Introduction

- No special remarks. However, there is one sloppiness in the reference Olivier de Sardan and Ridde, 2016): the year is different from the reference list.... (2014).

2. Material and methods

- In section 2 again sloppiness regarding the citations: three citations are not listed in the reference list !

3. Results

3.1. *Scientific interest in public policies and reforms in the agricultural sector*

- The Table 3 in this part has no meaning for the scope of this article. In addition, from the 44 references listed in this table, almost half (20 !!) are not even appearing in the final reference list (with 50 references !), and several are not even cited in the text. This is confusing !. So, in my opinion, this table 3 should disappear in the final publication. Maybe you can summarize in the text of part 3.1. the share of different types of documents from the references in the list : hence “.... % are research articles, % are books/ bookchapters,% are doctoral theses, and% are research- or study reports”

Even so In the reference list itself it should become clear whether a publication is a research article, book chapter, doctoral thesis or research report.

- In the text part of 3.1. the only reference mentioned is also absent in the reference list !

3.2. *The trajectory of reforms in the agricultural sector in Benin from the independence period till the date*

In the introductory part,, the authors speak about three major milestones ? What are these milestones ? In the next text of part 3.2, five trajectories are indicated !

1st period **1960 - 1972**: No special remarks here, however again two cited references not found in the reference list.

2nd period **1972 to 1990**: A list of abbreviations should be part of the article, at least for abbreviations that are mentioned in the text more than once!

3rd period **1990 to 2006**: No special remarks. See previous remark concerning abbreviation list.

4th period **2006 to 2016**: Again, abbreviation list for more than once mentioned abbreviations very desirable. The APRM abbreviation is even nowhere explained and partly therefore its role is misty. N’Goye et al., 2021 is in reference list, but not where it is published !

5th period **2016 to present**: - As for the description of the previous period, the role of APRM remains misty, and therefore it is unclear what will be hand-over to the farmers and their professional organizations.

-PNDFs look to be the abbreviation of “Programmes Nationaux de Développement des Filières” and I think therefore that a better translation is National Programme for the Development of Chains.

3.3. *Necessity and ineffectiveness of agricultural sector reforms from yesterday to today: backpedaling!*

- “backpedaling” in the title is too strong, better say something like “too slow progress”. In Benin there are clear examples of good reforms, e.g. Cotton. Benin managed to improve from a backward 8th position of cotton growing countries in

Africa in 2011 (after the cotton crisis), to become the best producing cotton country from 2018 up to now. Another example of good progress: Cashew. Before 2000 almost no cashew was produced by a few hundred farmers. In 2020 and 2021 Benin is producer no. 5 in the world, coming from almost 170 000 smallholders.

- Olivier de Sardan & Ridde (2014) indeed wrote that no country in the world is able to implement 100% coherent and consistent reforms, but also that the level of incoherences and inconsistencies for similar reforms between countries can be very large.

- Almost nothing is written on the results of the drastic “rationalization” after 2016. That looks meagre for a publication that is published 7 years later. By now there must be at least some indications of how some of these drastic reforms have worked out. Your article would be much more valuable if you can report some of such indications.

- Via Google I found “ Maboudou-Alidou G1, Hinnou LC2 and AAO Ayedoun (2022) “Determinants de la proximité des services agricoles dans les poles de développement agricoles au Bénin” <https://doi.org/10.18697/ajfand.112.21235>” and I must say the picture looks much better than what it was when I was working in Benin. At least there has been some progress!

4. Conclusion

I think that it has more sense to concentrate research on the failures but also the successes of the actual ongoing strategic agricultural development plan (PSDSA), instead of researching failures of all past interventions. In fact this should be part of a functional periodical monitoring and evaluation (M&E) programme. A critical review of perceptions of agricultural actors that do not act according to expectations is, of course, also part of good periodical M&E's

Some final additional remarks:

- Concerning my recommendation to include a list of abbreviations.

As most of them originated from French, you put the English translation in brackets behind the original text e.g.:

CARDER – Centre Agricole Régional pour le Développement Rural (Regional agricultural centre for rural development)

- Concerning the references:

A golden rule for scientific articles is all cited publications should be found in the reference list, while on the other hand all references in the list should be found at least once in the text. This is certainly not the case in your publication. I found about 7 or 8 cited publications that were not in the reference list, while there were also about 8 publications in the reference list that were not cited. (NB: this observation is not referring to the, in my view, superfluous Table 3, where about 20 references are not listed in the reference list, and most of them are also not even cited in the text. Most striking,

this is the case of the research reports , but in all document types you find examples of authors that were not listed in the reference list and several of them not cited even in the text)_.

Finally, some citations seem not correct, e.g. In the reference list : Ibikoule E.G. & Jaehyon, L.E.E. (2021) is cited in the text as Ibikoule and Lee (2021) , but it should probably be Ibikoule and Jaehyon (2021); Senahou (2000) in the text, Senahoun (2000) in the reference list and the before last citation of Aplogan et al., the year is not correct (2021), should be 2022); Kpadé & Boinon (2016): in References (2011).

- My value judgement of the publication

The publication as it is now, I have not given it more than two stars (**).

If you can incorporate my recommendations, including some more information on the outcome of the reforms of 2016/2017: It may become as good as four stars (****).

If you correct the references in text and reference list , include an abbreviation list and scrap Table 3, for me the publication value will become a three star rating (**).