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

Romeo Sossou¹, Karl Martial Nassi, Léonard Cossi Hinnou

¹ Institut National des Recherches Agricoles du Bénin

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Abstract

Since Benin's accession to national sovereignty and its entry into the market economy, the governance of the agricultural sector has undergone major transformations to meet the challenges it faces. These changes have led to the experimentation of various developmental approaches to the dominant ideology of each period. However, the various agricultural policies initiated by the government seem to have led to inconclusive results in terms of boosting the Beninese agricultural sector. Here, we critically analyze Benin's agricultural reforms from 1960 to the present by reviewing the available literature on the subject. The results show that the main changes identified relate to the alignment of agricultural policies with the directives of external powers and national orientations, as well as an overhaul of the sector's governance structures. Recently, the institutional reforms undertaken have essentially been summarized in the territorialization of agricultural development, the rationalization of the institutional landscape, and the liberalization of advisory services. However, the agricultural sector is still characterized by a certain immobility despite the claimed reforms with an apparent participatory approach to its governance. The effective consideration of the aspirations of all stakeholders in the implementation of reforms is key to ensuring ownership of agricultural policies.

Keywords: Governance, Policy analysis, Agricultural development, Reforms, Benin.

1. Introduction

Agriculture is a strategic sector for economic and social development in developing countries (Otsuka, 2013). In these countries, agriculture contributes to growth in several forms: as a source of raw materials for other sectors, as a generator of revenue for investments, as a creator of jobs, and as a means of reducing poverty (Norton, 2014). Two main cumulative reasons have driven much of the effort in the agricultural sector in Sub-Saharan Africa in recent years. The first is the desire to transform agriculture by increasing the productivity and quantity of agricultural products, and the second is the need to guarantee the food and nutritional security of populations in the context of security, health, climate, and political crises. At the same time, the consolidation of these efforts depends, in particular, on strengthening the national and

regional institutional capacities of structures operating in the agricultural sector (African Development Bank Group - AfDB, 2016). While recognizing the central role of policy and strategic directions in improving agricultural productivity (Douillet and Girard, 2013; Zimmerman *et al.* (2009), the process of improving agricultural production involves a step-by-step process in which a “good” policy or strategy is formulated, implemented, and monitored for results (Long, 1994).

In Benin, the performance of the agricultural sector has remained relatively weak for decades despite its potential and the various reforms implemented in the sector (Honfoga, 2018). Since the colonial period, the governance of Benin’s agricultural sector has undergone major changes to address the multiple challenges it faces (Adjovi, 2020). These changes have shaped the institutional landscape of the agricultural sector and have led to the (re) formulation of strategic visions and objectives about the dominant ideology in each period for various reasons. Given the mixed results achieved by agricultural policies in Benin, it is necessary to revisit the past and question the ideological trajectories and contexts that shaped their emergence. Indeed, “virtual” national agricultural policies are characterized by a piling up of documents and texts over the years without a real impact on agricultural production and food security (Balié and Foulleux, 2008). Thus, many questions remain about their consistency with national development orientations and approaches to identification, formulation, validation, communication, implementation, and even evaluation (Hassenteufel, 2011; Olivier de Sardan and Ridde, 2016).

Despite the various agricultural policies developed and implemented over the years, the agricultural sector is faced with five major problems that call into question the strategies adopted. These problems are the low level of productivity and production, the unfavorable environment for structuring value chains, the still weak resilience of populations to the effects of climate change, the weak level of governance at different levels of the agricultural sector, and finally, the poor accessibility of financing to farms (MAEP, 2017). Reviewing the contexts and contents of these agricultural policies diachronically has the advantage of not only understanding the logic that guided the choice of its policies but also of appreciating the scope of its institutional reforms of the agricultural sector in Benin.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Data collection

The research is based essentially on the literature review. The temporality of our look into the past is based on the period of Dahomey’s accession to international sovereignty. This period assumes that public actions directed toward the rural world in general and the agricultural sector, in particular, were set on an agenda and shaped independently by national actors. The diachronic approach mobilized for this research is based on the need to reconstruct previous dynamics over time and to present the configurations of the moment to better appreciate the “ways of acting, thinking and feeling” (Durkheim, 2011: p.65) of agricultural actors in the face of current reforms.

Data were obtained from the review of scientific work and policy documents related to agricultural policies. To this end, the search engines www.sciencedirect.com, www.scholar.google.com, and www.google.fr were used to search the

literature (Akpovo *et al.*, 2022) on agricultural policies in Benin covering the period from 1960 to 2022. Various keywords were entered into the search engines, including “agricultural policies,” “reforms,” “agricultural sector,” “history of the agricultural sector,” “Benin,” “Dahomey,” “agricultural policy,” “development” and “reforms.” Each key concept was combined using the Boolean operators “OR” and “AND”. This allowed us to identify relevant documents that might have used different synonyms for the same word.

Open-access documents have been downloaded. For restricted publications (paid or requiring organizational membership), requests were made to the authors. Manual and snowball searches were performed to include studies not identified by the search strategy (Abate *et al.*, 2022). Bibliographic references of documents downloaded online were searched to identify other works with a focus on agricultural policies in Benin. Various inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined to refine the search and select the most relevant publications (Davis *et al.*, 2014). These criteria are described in Table 1.

In addition, apart from decrees, ministerial council statements, and ministerial orders, the following agricultural policy documents that have been developed and implemented were consulted:

- the Letter of Declaration of Rural Development Policy (Lettre de Déclaration de Politique de Développement Rural - LDPDR) in 1991;
- the Declaration of Rural Development Policy (Déclaration de Politique de Développement Rural - DPDR) in 1999, which is the result of the review of the LDPDR in 1995;
- the Master Plan for Rural Agricultural Development (Schéma Directeur du Développement Agricole Rural - SDDAR) operationalized by the Strategic Operational Plan (Plan Stratégique Opérationnel - PSO) in August 2000;
- the Strategic Plan for the Recovery of the Agricultural Sector (Plan Stratégique pour la Relance du Secteur Agricole - PSRSA) 2011 - 2015;
- The Strategic Plan for the Development of the Agricultural Sector (Plan Stratégique de Développement du Secteur Agricole - PSDSA) 2025 coupled with the National Plan for Agricultural Investments and Food and Nutritional Security (Plan National d'Investissements Agricoles et de Sécurité Alimentaire et Nutritionnelle - PNIASAN) 2017 - 2021 and
- The agriculture component of the Government Action Plans (Plans d'Action du Gouvernement - PAG) 2016-2021 and 2021-2026

Table 1. Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of documents

Items	Document Selection grid	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Type of document	1= The document is either a note, a data sheet, a press article, or a thesis (bachelor, master, engineer) 2= The document is a study report or a technical and information document 3= The document is a thesis, a book, or a book chapter 4 = The document is a scientific article	(2) & (3)	(1)
Area of coverage	1= The study is not conducted in or about Benin 2 = The study includes Benin in the area of coverage 3 = The study is conducted on the part of Benin 4 = The study is carried out on the entire territory of Benin	(2), (3) & (4)	(1)
Accessibility	1= Access to the document is restricted by conditions that we do not meet and inaccessible even after a request to the authors 2 = The document is downloadable without conditions or accessible by request to the authors	(2)	(1)
Duplication	The document appeared in more than one search engines	An accessible version of the document is retained	The other versions are not retained
Topic or abstract of the document	1= Title and abstract do not address agricultural policies 2= Title does not address, but the summary does address agricultural policies 3= Title and abstract address agricultural policies	(2) & (3)	(1)
Methodological quality	1= Document does not have a methodology section 2= Methodology is not very detailed and not easily understandable 3= Methodology is clear and transparent but cannot be replicated due to internal and external factors 4= Methodology is clear, understandable, and reproducible	(3) & (4)	(1) & (2)
Relevance of results	1 = Poor 2 = Low 3 = High 4 = Very high 5 = Excellent	(3), (4) & (5)	(1) & (2)

2.2. Data analysis

First, a reading grid was developed and used to organize the information and examine it according to categories such as

geographic coverage, content, quality of methodology, methods, and theories used (Snyder, 2019). Second, the set of documents consulted was subjected to thematic content analysis supported by descriptive statistics, including the frequency, by decade, of works on agricultural policies since 1960. Third, the assessment of the relevance of the documents for the present research was performed using a five-point Likert-type scale: 1 = poor; 2 = low; 3 = high; 4 = very high; and 5 = excellent (Affognon *et al.*, 2015). Fourth, the documents selected were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis and classified according to the year of publication, relevance, document type, and study coverage area. Fifth, the diachronic method allowed for the analysis of the trajectory of reforms over the six-decade period. Furthermore, an organized and structured writing of the review was possible thanks to a synthesis of each document selected.

3. Results

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

We identified a total of 37,214 scientific works on public policies and reforms in Benin's agricultural sector from the search engines (Table 2). By applying the first inclusion and exclusion criterion (type of document), we obtained 19,871 documents. Subsequently, the coverage area criterion allowed us to reduce the number of documents to 4,571. After removing duplicates and closed-access (inaccessible) documents and applying the criterion of the presence of key concepts in the subject and/or abstract, the number of eligible documents decreased to 1007. Following the application of the criterion relating to the quality of the methodology adopted in the document, 97 documents were considered eligible. Indeed, only documents with a clear, transparent, and understandable methodology were eligible. Finally, only 44 documents were retained after the evaluation of the relevance of the results (Affognon *et al.*, 2015), with at least a "satisfactory relevance" after the full-text review (Table 3).

The temporal analysis of the documents consulted showed that work on agricultural policies or public interventions in the agricultural sector in Benin has gradually increased (Table 2). It was mainly from 2001 onward that the number of publications exceeded 11,000 publications.

Table 2. Publications on agricultural policies and reforms in the agricultural sector

Years of publication	Quantity and percentage		Increasing cumulative frequency	
	n	%	n	%
1960 - 1970	346	0,9%	346	0,9%
1971 - 1980	638	1,7%	984	2,6%
1981 - 1990	1 620	4,4%	2 604	7,0%
1991 - 2000	3 780	10,2%	6384	17,2%
2001 - 2010	11 000	29,6%	17 384	46,7%
2011 - 2020	16 400	44,1%	33 784	90,8%
2021 - 2022	3 430	9,2%	37 214	100%

Moreover, all the documents selected for the research were grouped into four categories: scientific articles, books or book chapters, theses or dissertations, and study reports. There were 25 scientific articles published in national and international journals. Five (05) books and book chapters and five (05) theses on agricultural policies in Benin. The remaining nine (9) documents were found in the gray literature. These trends reflect the growing interest of researchers, in this case, academics, in agricultural policy issues over the last 20 years. Particularly in Benin, agricultural policy issues have received more attention in the last decade (Table 3).

Table 3. Documents on agricultural policies and reforms in Benin mobilized

Types of documents	Quantity	References
Research Articles	25	Adjovi, 2020; Oloukoï (2018); Oloukoï <i>et al.</i> (2013); Honfoga (2018), Acacha <i>et al.</i> (2019), Affomaï et Koné (2017); Alé (2008), Aplogan <i>et al.</i> (2022); Balié et Fouilleux (2008); Bierschenk (1997); Fouilleux et Balié (2009); Hirsch (2002); Ibikoulé et Lee (2009); Kpadé et Boinon (2011); Lavigne Delville (2018); Le Meur (2000); Mercoiret (2006); Dissou (1992); Delville (2010); Bierschenk <i>et al.</i> (1998); Kherallah <i>et al.</i> (2001); Dayou <i>et al.</i> (2020); N'Goye <i>et al.</i> (2021); Bendjebbar et Fouilleux (2022); Ribier (2002).
Books/Book Chapters	5	Avom et Ongo Nkoa (2019); Balié et Ricoy (2010); Floquet et Mongbo (1998); Ribier et Baris (2014), Neefjes (1986)
Doctoral thesis	5	Nassi (2013); Bendjebbar (2018); Onifade Fagbemi (1986); Toudonou (1987); Senahoun (2000);
Research reports or Study reports	9	Ahoyo Adjovi <i>et al.</i> , (2013), Amen (2009), CEDEAO (2015); Deniel (2008); Hodonou (2002); Interréseaux <i>et al.</i> (2012); Soulé (2012); Houinsou (2002); Balaro <i>et al.</i> , (2015);

The search identified that 20% of the documents are study reports relevant to the topic (Figure 1a). More than 63% of the documents focused solely on Benin (Figure 1b). The remaining papers presented studies that were either comparative in approach with other countries or for the West African subregion as a whole. Approximately 80% of studies were completed during the 2001-2022 period (Figure 1c). Analysis of the relevance of these documents revealed that 36.4% were excellent, 29.5% were good, and 34.1% had satisfactory relevance (Figure 1d).

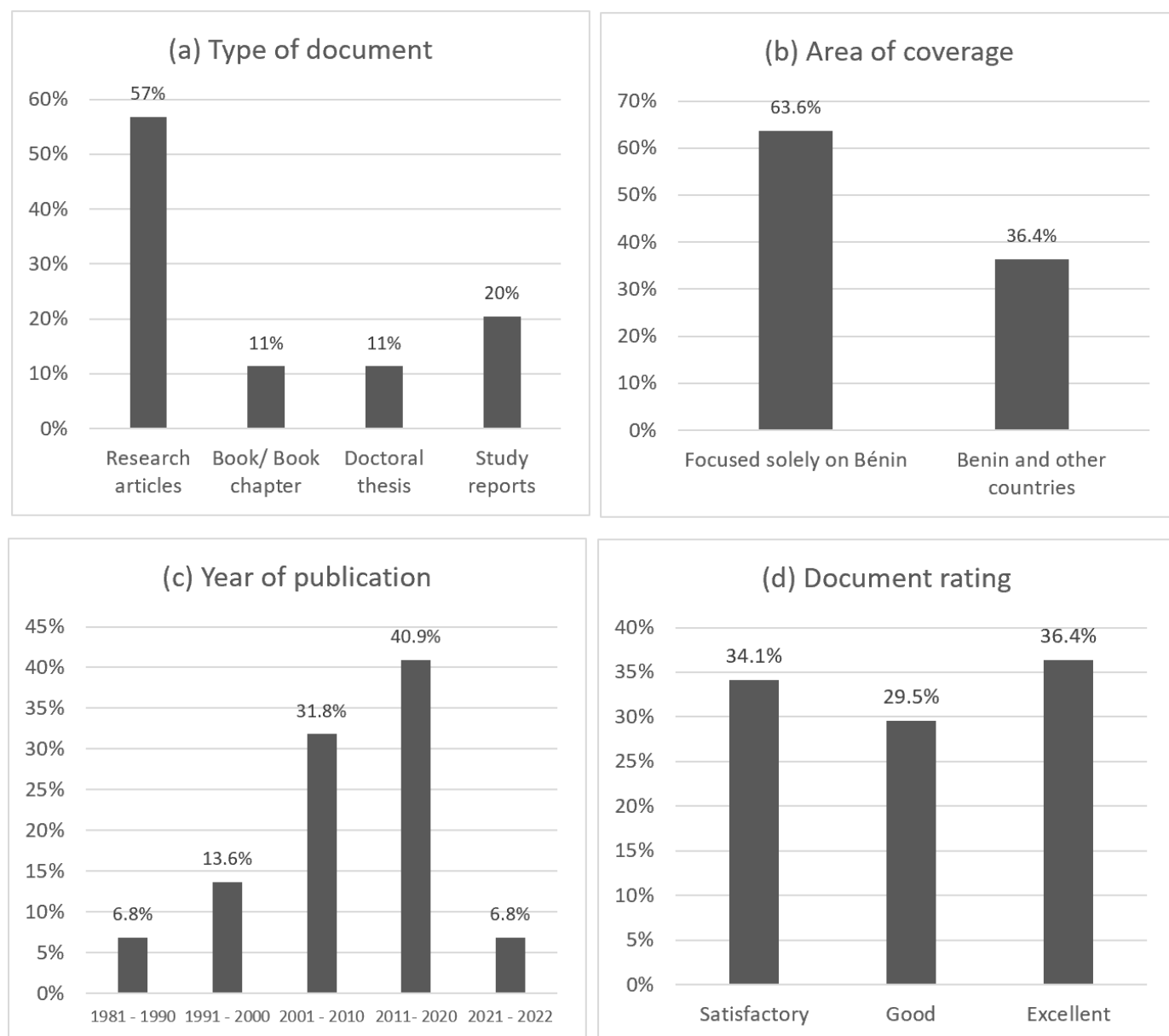


Figure 1. Profile of agricultural policy documents used in the analyses

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

In Benin, public interventions in rural areas have evolved from a comprehensive approach to a sectoral and integrated approach (Affomaï and Koné, 2017). Overall, agricultural policies in Benin have undergone three major milestones since the country gained national sovereignty (Nassi, 2013; Adjovi, 2020).

■ 1960 - 1972: A “forced” quest for economic growth

This period is marked by the ideology of territorial independence (Adjovi, 2020). Indeed, in the aftermath of independence, the new governments expressed their desire to put an end to colonial practices while maintaining the conventional management of rural development. Economic liberalism was the development model. Public actions in the agricultural sector were influenced by the evolutionary conception of development and mimicry of Western policies (Fouilleux and

Balié, 2009). This Rostowian conception postulates that the country must pass through the successive stages of traditional society to meet the preconditions for take-off, then take off, make progress toward maturity, and enter the era of mass consumption (Rostow, 1965).

One of the conditions for achieving this goal was the reorganization of the agricultural sector. This major reform was carried out through the establishment of rural development perimeters, the creation of village groups called cooperatives, the promotion of food crops such as rice for the local and subregional (mainly Nigeria) market, and the beginning of large-scale processing of agricultural products (Ahoyo Adjovi *et al.*, 2013). Avom and Ongo Nkoa (2021) state that this period is characterized economically by the creation of factories to process raw materials. These initiatives had the same results as those of the colonial period because the agricultural policies put in place by national leaders were simply a transposition of the colonizer's interventions. Ahoyo Adjovi *et al.* 2013 pointed out that the reference model in force during this period was agricultural cooperation between Dahomey and France. Public interventions directly affecting peasant organizations were seen as solutions to the problems of the agricultural sector (Avom and Ongo Nkoa, 2021). This is because local leaders and "bureaucrats" were the only products of the metropolis education system (Austin, 2010).

Rural development cooperatives have led to the loss of control of individual farmers over their land holdings (Affomaï and Koné, 2017). Expropriations of farmland for public use by the State led to the creation of rural development zones for the production of selected palms for French industries (Floquet and Mongbo, 1998; Daane and Mongbo, 1991). This responsibility was entrusted to the Société Nationale de Développement Rural (SONADER), which took the name Société Béninoise de Palmier à Huile (SOBEPALH). The Société Nationale des Huileries du Dahomey (SNAHDA) was created to handle the processing of palm nuts. To increase cotton production, the Compagnie Française de Développement des Textiles (CFDT), created in 1949, expanded its activities (Kpade and Boinon, 2011). For the authors, this period is characterized by an institutional model of economic integration marked by public actions to protect the cotton sector against exogenous shocks. These actions were aimed primarily at ensuring a stable and remunerative price for cotton farmers and making cotton no longer a poor crop but an attractive and secure crop for farmers who practiced it.

For Le Meur (2006), the period following independence (1960-1972) was characterized by a dualism marked by both the continuation of agricultural policies inherited from colonization and the desire to break away from the domination of the metropolis. This break was manifested by the "cooperativization" of agriculture and the promotion of food crops that local populations needed for food. In addition, state interventionism with the target of "catching up" with rich countries in the race for development has resulted in the forcing of cotton production (Alé, 2008), attempts to transform agricultural products (Ahoyo Adjovi *et al.*, 2013) and the expropriation of land and forced labor of farmers by cooperatives (Kherallah *et al.*, 2001; Affomaï and Koné, 2017), which have resulted in failure and the "pauperization" of local farmers (Nassi, 2013). These failures in the agricultural sector, as well as in other vital sectors of the country, led to a new ideology: Marxist-Leninism.

■ *From 1972 to 1990: Benin's agricultural sector in a revolutionary period*

Against the backdrop of the World Bank's prescriptions regarding the failures of previous agricultural policies, a new paradigm was born: Integrated Rural Development. This change in approach in the agricultural sector coincided with the

change in the political trajectory in Benin in October 1972. The priority of the revolutionary military regime was a centralized and planned economy based on the agricultural sector to guarantee food security for the Beninese (Senahou, 2000). The announced break with the past is clear: food self-sufficiency and the nutritional balance of the population come first. Local production of cash crops must first supply local industries with raw materials before the surplus is exported. To achieve this, external interventions (scientific and technological knowledge) are combined with local practices (endogenous peasant knowledge) with a concentration of actions in rural areas (Nassi, 2013). This integrated rural development policy aims to satisfy the essential needs of rural actors by considering all factors (internal and external, economic and social). Operationally, there have been:

- the creation of the Société Nationale des Fruits et Légumes (SONAFEL) in 1975
- the creation of Grands Moulins du Bénin (GMB) for cereals in 1972;
- the breach of contract with the Compagnie Française de Développement des Textiles (CFDT) in 1975
- the creation of the Société de Commercialisation et de Crédit Agricole du Dahomey (SOCAD) in 1972
- the Société Nationale de Commercialisation et d'Exportation du Bénin (SONACEB) in 1975 for cotton exports;
- the creation of the Société Nationale des Produits Agricoles (SONAGRI) in 1975 for the promotion of agriculture and the development of food crops;
- the creation of the Société d'Aménagement de la Vallée de l'Ouémé (SADEVO) in 1972 for hydroagricultural development, which became the Société Nationale d'Irrigation et d'Aménagement Hydroagricole (SONIAH) in 1975 and the Office Béninois d'Aménagement Rural (OBAR) in 1982;
- the creation and generalization of Regional Action Centers for Rural Development (CARDER) for the supply of inputs, extension, supervision and agricultural training, as well as the establishment of agricultural credits in 1975;
- the merger of SONACEB, SONAGRI and the Fonds Autonome de Stabilisation et de Soutien des Prix des Produits Agricoles (FAS) to create the Société Nationale pour la Promotion Agricole (SONAPRA) in 1983 with the recall of the CFDT.

Overall, this period was marked by a break from the primary satisfaction of the needs of “others” and the prioritization of the needs of “one’s own. The interventions were oriented more precisely in rural areas with a consideration of the farmers’ knowledge. In addition, current Marxism favored the creation of state-owned companies and the promotion of socialist forms of organization, such as the Groupements Révolutionnaires à Vocation Coopérative and the Coopératives Agricoles Expérimentales de Type Socialiste (experimental agricultural cooperatives of a socialist type), whose goal was class struggle in rural areas, collectivization of the means of production, and technical modernization (Ibikoule and Lee, 2021). At the institutional level, one of the major transformations in the agricultural sector during this period was the generalization of CARDERs in 1975 (Adjovi, 2020). As public organizations of an industrial and commercial nature, the CARDERs were intended to guarantee integrated regional development, and brought about profound changes in rural areas throughout the country.

The analysis of public interventions in the agricultural field during the so-called revolutionary period reveals that the actions undertaken were guided by a desire for endogenous development influenced by Marxist ideology, where

nationalism and socialism led to the establishment of national structures and societies aimed at improving the conditions of rural actors. However, these initiatives ended in failure and backtracking. For example, SONIAH was only able to develop a total area of 100 ha out of the 7,000 ha initially planned; CFDT, which was dismissed in 1975, was recalled in 1983 for the cotton sector; and SONAPRA, whose objective was to deal with agricultural promotion in general, focused essentially on cotton (a cash crop). These failures resulted from the failure to take into consideration issues of access to and control of land resources and an imbalance between agricultural activities and the geographic and environmental characteristics of rural areas (Bendjebbar and Fouilleux, 2022). For Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan (2003), the failure lies in the neglect of the social, cultural, and economic conditions of the regions concerned by public interventions. In addition, the constant changes and/or mergers of the companies created, the heavy burden of the integrated rural development projects, the disinterest of the rural actors, and their migration to Nigeria. This period ended with the bankruptcy of the State in 1989, and Benin was forced to sign a structural adjustment plan (SAP) with the IMF. The SAP led to policies of liberalization of enterprises in the agricultural sector and a minimum of direct intervention for the benefit of farmers (Balié and Fouilleux, 2008).

■ *From 1990 to 2006: Agricultural policies with visions*

During the 1990s, Houinsou (2002) noted that the gradual opening of Benin's economy to the outside world brought about several changes in the agricultural sector. The first significant intervention in the sector during this period was the signing and adoption of the Lettre de Déclaration de Politique de Développement Rural (LDPDR) between the Government of Benin, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in 1991 as a strategic instrument defining Benin's agricultural orientations based on a vision (Lavigne Delville, 2018). This was followed by the establishment of a National Agricultural Extension System (SNVA) and the Agricultural Services Restructuring Project (PRSA), the objective of which is to harmonize public intervention in terms of support for farmers at the national level: the CARDERs cede their commercial and industrial activities to SONAPRA, become agricultural organizations and henceforth focus on an agricultural advisory (Adjovi, 2020). According to Ahoyo Adjovi *et al.* (2013), the State disengaged from economic activities (production, processing, and marketing) and concentrated on its regalian missions (extension, support to farmers' organizations, regulation, etc.) following the principles of economic liberalism.

Four years after its implementation, the LDPDR was reviewed in 1995 and gave way to another strategic document for the agricultural sector, the Déclaration de Politique de Développement Rural (DPDR), in 1999. Since 2000, the Schéma Directeur du Développement Agricole Rural (SDDAR) has been the sector's strategic document. It is operationalized by the Strategic Operational Plan (SOP), approved in August 2000. The PSO is structured in 14 subsectoral and cross-cutting action plans, namely, (1) support to farmers' organizations, (2) institutional support to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, (3) diversification of agricultural production, (4) conservation, processing, and marketing of agricultural products, (5) livestock, (6) fisheries, (7) rural financing, (8) rural legislation and agricultural products, (9) natural resource management and soil fertility, (10) rural infrastructure, (11) gender and development, (12) rural communication and information, (13) monitoring and evaluation, and (14) extension and training (Hodonou, 2010). There was a gradual privatization of input supply from 1992 to 1998 and of cotton ginning from 1995 to 2000 (Kpadé and Boinon, 2011). In 1998, farmers' organizations set up the Coopérative d'Approvisionnement et de Gestion des Intrants Agricoles (CAGIA) to

better organize input distribution. A year later, the Association Interprofessionnelle du Coton (AIC) was created, bringing together producers, ginners, and input suppliers to manage key functions and serve as an intermediary between professional families and the State (Ibikoule & Lee, 2021). In May 2004, thanks to Decree No. 2004-301, the CARDERs were transformed into Regional Centers for Agricultural Promotion (CeRPA) at the regional level. The latter are represented at the level of each municipality by the Centres Communaux de Promotion Agricole (CeCPA), which are run by specialized technicians and directed by a manager to ensure greater proximity to farmers and provide specific agricultural advisory services (Aplogan *et al.*, 2022). For Hodonou (2010), the agricultural policies implemented since 2001 were aimed primarily at achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These policies should essentially ensure that the population has sufficient food and nutritional needs and that their poverty is reduced through a sufficient and sustainable increase in income.

■ 2006 to 2016: Resurgence of the Green Revolution

In 2006, a new government took power. A global and in-depth diagnosis of the agricultural and rural sectors was made to define a development policy for the sector. As a result of this diagnosis, Benin's Strategic Development Orientations (2006-2011), as well as the Growth Strategy for Poverty Reduction (GSPR/2007-2009), impart the idea of the "Green Revolution" that will allow Benin to become a competitive agricultural economy in the coming years (Honfoga, 2018).

In 2007, a white paper on agricultural advisory services was drafted, followed by the adoption of the National Agricultural Advisory System (SNCA) and the recruitment of nearly two thousand agents for the Regional Agricultural Promotion Centers (CeRPA) (Aplogan *et al.*, 2022). These centers were later transformed into Regional Action Centers for Rural Development (CARDER) in 2013 due to inefficiency (Adjovi, 2020). However, the CARDERs were dissolved and liquidated with the adoption of Decree No. 2008-245 of May 6, 2008. At the same time, the food crisis in 2007 prompted the government to grant subsidies on certain foodstuffs and necessities and to set up the Office National d'Appui à la Sécurité Alimentaire (ONASA). In 2008, the Strategic Plan for the Recovery of the Agricultural Sector (PSRSA) was finalized and validated, but it was not until 2011 that this strategic document was implemented (APRM, 2011). This represents a gap of three years between policy formulation and implementation. The PSRSA, structured with fourteen strategic objectives, aimed to improve the performance of Benin's agriculture sustainably so that it would be able to ensure food and nutritional sovereignty, contribute to Benin's economic and social development, achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and reduce poverty (N'Goye *et al.*, 2021). In this plan, support for so-called priority sectors was retained, and thirteen priority sectors were included. The PSRSA advocates productivity and competitiveness and encourages the development of modern and professional family farming (Bendjebbar and Fouilleux, 2022).

During this period, several accompanying measures were taken and envisaged to make the revival of the agricultural sector effective. These measures include securing and improving access to production factors and agricultural financing. The National Fund for Agricultural Development (FNDA) was created to finance farmers in the form of subsidies and to serve as a guarantee fund for banks and microfinance institutions. The mechanization of the agricultural sector covers the modernization of still rudimentary agricultural equipment through the creation of the Agricultural Mechanization Development Agency (ADMA-SA). The APRM has developed the National Agricultural Mechanization Strategy, which

aims to achieve 20% mechanization of plowed areas by 2015. Concerning access to chemical fertilizers and plant protection products, it has been established that each year, a significant tonnage of fertilizer for maize and other crops goes through cotton tenders. To guarantee land tenure security, Law 2007-03 of October 16, 2007, on rural land tenure in the Republic of Benin was passed and provides legal recognition of land rights established or acquired according to custom. It should make it possible to simplify land access rights (Lavigne Delville, 2018). Agricultural advisory services, although a shared function, are provided essentially by public services with an operating mode based on responding to concerns expressed by farmers and are not very effective (Aplogan *et al.*, 2022).

Government interventions in the agricultural sector during the period also included tax relief on the import of basic commodities and measures to revive short-cycle food production (Ahoyo Adjovi *et al.*, 2013). Two programs have been developed to revive short-cycle food production. These were the Plan d'Urgence d'Appui à la Sécurité Alimentaire (PUASA) in 2007 and the Programme de Diversification de l'Agriculture par la Valorization des Vallées (PDVV) in 2008 (Bendjebbar & Fouilleux, 2022). Despite these actions, the gains have not been sufficiently sustained over time to induce sustainable economic growth, sustained food security, and rational management of natural resources (N'Goye *et al.*, 2021).

■ *From 2016 to the present: the era of rationalization of the agricultural sector*

Given the depth of the problems linked to the various previous policies with implications in terms of challenges and issues, the new regime in power in 2016 initiated reforms in the agricultural sector (Adjovi, 2020) to “raise the country to the rank of regional agricultural power, with a large production capacity, in the sectors of crop production, livestock, and fisheries. To this end, one of the first actions is the creation of the Bureau of Studies and Support to the Agricultural Sector (B2A) with Decree No. 2016-351 of June 15, 2016, on the creation, attributions, organization, and functioning of the Bureau of Studies and Support to the Agricultural Sector (B2A). Consisting of experts in different subsectors, the B2A's main mission was to conduct strategic reflections and initiate actions to ensure the achievement of the government's objectives in agricultural development.

In July 2016, Decree No. 422 of July 20, 2016, was adopted on the Attributions, Organization, and Functioning of the APRM. Compared to the previous decree (No. 2012-541 of December 17, 2012), the new text enshrined the abolition of General Directorates such as the Directorate General of Agricultural Development of Food and Nutrition (DGDAN) and the Directorate General of Planning and Rural Equipment (DGAER). The Directorate of Innovations, Agricultural Advice and Operational Training (DICAF) was changed to the Directorate of Quality, Innovations and Entrepreneurial Training (DQIFE).

Then, Decree No. 2016-681 of November 07, 2016, on the institutional framework of agricultural development established the creation of Agricultural Development Poles (PDA), twelve (12) Departmental Directorates of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (DDAEP) and the disengagement of the State from the productive sector. The Territorial Agencies for Agricultural Development (ATDA) have been established to manage and administer the seven poles created. The purpose of these ATDAs is to ensure a better combination of the sectoral approach and the territorial approach, as well as the

application of related instruments and approaches. The six CARDERs are, therefore, liquidated (once again) based on the repeal of Decree No. 2013-137 of March 20, 2013, transforming the Regional Centers for Agricultural Promotion into Regional Agricultural Centers for Rural Development (CARDER).

In October 2016, due to the failure of cashew nut, mango, orange juice, pineapple juice, cashew juice, tomato puree, peanut shelling workshop, and mini rice mills, the government decided to transfer them to private operators.

In November 2016, it was decided to liquidate the Office National d'Appui à la Sécurité Alimentaire (ONASA), the Office National de Stabilization et de soutien des prix des revenus agricoles (ONS), the Centrale d'Achat des Intrants Agricoles (CAIA-SA) and the Société Nationale de Promotion Agricole (SONAPRA) as part of the rationalization of the institutional landscape of the MAEP.

In December 2016, the liquidation of the Agence de Promotion des Aménagements Hydro-Agricoles (APAHSA) and the Agence de Développement de la Mécanisation Agricole (ADMA -SA) was decided upon. This intervention is justified by the quest for coherence, synergy, and efficiency.

B2A was dissolved toward the end of 2017, and its members were redeployed to other functions. The Agence Nationale de Mécanisation Agricole (ANaMA), created by decree n°2019-123 of April 10, 2019, was transformed two years later into the Société Nationale de Mécanisation Agricole (SoNaMA) by decree n°117/21 of April 28, 2021, approving the statutes of SoNaMA,

To ensure the autonomy of cotton research and the development of new technologies for the production and valorization of cotton byproducts, the Cotton and Fiber Agricultural Research Center (CRA-CF) of the National Agricultural Research Institute of Benin (INRAB) was transferred to the Interprofessional Cotton Association (AIC) through Decree No. 2020-021 of January 8, 2020, approving the revised framework agreement between the State and the Interprofessional Cotton Association.

On July 19, 2022, the law on agricultural orientation, food security, and nutrition in the Republic of Benin was promulgated. Finally, the merger by absorption of the Central Laboratory of Food Safety (LCSSA) by the Beninese Agency of Food Safety (ABSSA) was decided and recorded by Decree 2022-451 of July 27, 2022. Finally, on 11 November 2022, the government decided to grant a concession for the Glazoué and Malanville rice mills to a private operator.

These restructuring actions, whether they be suppression, creation, liquidation, assignment, transfer, merger, or leasing, contribute to the rationalization of the institutional landscape of the agricultural sector. This period was, therefore, strongly marked by subcontracting, where services previously provided by the State were entrusted to private operators who had to respect specific specifications. This involved processual and structural reforms in the agricultural sector and a revision of the national strategy for implementing agricultural advisory services (Aplogan *et al.*, 2021). As Ribier (2002) points out, the provision of services, including agricultural advisory services, which were once a shared function, has been liberalized. The National Agricultural Advisory Strategy (NAAS 2018-2025) will end the primary role of APRM, which was essentially that of the project owner (commissioning the implementation of agricultural advisory services) and project manager

(executing/providing agricultural advisory services). In other words, the APRM “will gradually hand over control of the project to farmers and their professional organizations. For project management, this function must be delegated to private structures with proven expertise in agricultural consulting. This approach will allow the State to fully assume its regalian functions of controlling the quality of Agricultural Advisory services.” (MAEP, 2018).

One of the major interventions of public power in the agricultural sector is the territorialization of agricultural development. It includes the promotion of the commodity chain approach and the territory approach to produce more effects in terms of reducing poverty and strengthening food security (Honfoga, 2018). This approach makes it possible to highlight the existence of distribution channels for agricultural goods and to show the influence of public policies on local production systems (Temple *et al.*, 2011). Thus, one or two priority commodity chains have been selected based on their high value for grassroots actors and the national economy and then constitute “locomotives” for the other diversification commodities. These driving forces have been translated into coherent structuring projects through National Sector Development Programs (PNDFs), which are managed and coordinated by territorial agricultural development agencies. This reform is in line with the logic of making better use of local potential (MAEP, 2017).

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

“Reform and change are never inevitable” is the strong but meaningful assertion of Goldfinch (2009). The agricultural sector, the main provider of foreign exchange and employment in Benin, is prone to change. However, Olivier de Sardan & Ridde (2014) argue that institutional reforms, as a public policy, must be coherent and effective; this is by no means the case in any country in the world. Thus, a look at the reforms undertaken in the agricultural sector in Benin reveals inconsistencies: the changes follow the influence of the dominant ideologies of the moment and are punctuated by the injunctions or prescriptions of external institutions or powers without taking into account the particularities of the Beninese rural world. These agricultural policies are characterized by instability and ambiguity, continuity and rupture with successive administrations.

From independence until the mid-1980s, the incoherence of reforms in the agricultural sector was expressed by the conditionalities for the young sovereign State to benefit from cooperation with France. Public actions had to be put in place to force farmers to produce for the “metropolis”. This constraint to monoculture is the opposite of local production systems but, above all, a gateway to food and nutritional insecurity. After this period, structural adjustment programs gave rise to the second incoherent logic: “ready-made” reforms, without upstream preparation, without prior consultation of the “beneficiaries”, are imperatives in the framework of global financial negotiations with the Bretton Woods organizations. The noncontextualization of economic liberalism as the “only way forward” for development (in a Rostowian posture) explains the waves of reforms involving the withdrawal of the State from agricultural support functions, the elimination of compensatory mechanisms, and the mandatory opening of markets without consideration of Benin’s specificities (Alé, 2008). The ineffectiveness of the reforms justifies the current State of the sector with constraints such as (i) difficulties in availability and access to agricultural inputs and land; (ii) poor control of water and energy; (iii) low level of organization of agriculture sectors; (iv) isolation of production areas; (v) insufficiency and inadequacy of appropriate storage

infrastructure; (vi) embryonic mechanization; (vii) low resilience of vulnerable populations; (viii) incompleteness of institutional and organizational reforms; and (ix) insufficiency and inadequacy of financing for the agricultural sector (MAEP, 2017). The after-effects of these interventions are still perceptible in the organization of the sector (Ribier, 2002), its functioning (Lavigne Delville, 2018), the living conditions of rural populations (Nassi, 2013; Affomaï and Koné, 2017), regional integration (Balié and Fouilleux, 2008), agricultural advisory services (Aplogan *et al.*, 2022), value chains (Kpade and Boinon, 2016) and the socioeconomic development of communities (Adjovi, 2020).

4. Conclusion

This literature review has provided a chronological examination of public policies and socio-institutional changes in the agricultural sector in Benin up to 2016. In total, the agricultural sector has gone through five major phases in its history. The main changes identified relate to the alignment of agricultural policies with the dominant ideologies of the time, the directives of “others” and, to some extent, national orientations. It is observed that the sector has experienced, in the last period under review (2016 to date), the updating of strategic plans and investment plans. On the other hand, a gap is observed between the forecasts in the strategic documents and the achievements, as well as a repetition of ruptures and continuities. From a scientific point of view, there are still several avenues to be documented or addressed. These include the social perceptions of agricultural actors of institutional reforms, the appropriation of reforms by the different categories of actors to achieve the objectives set out in the strategic documents, and the impact of institutional changes on the organizational and productive dynamics of actors. Given the inconsistencies observed in the implementation of reforms and the inefficiencies in the agricultural sector at the national level since 1960, one might wonder whether the actions undertaken will make it possible to achieve the objectives of the sector. We suggest that an analysis of the failures of past interventions, as well as an effective consideration of the aspirations of all stakeholders in the shaping of reforms, should be performed upstream of reforms in the agricultural sector. In-depth research on the perceptions of agricultural actors, their strategies for adapting to and appropriating these reforms, and the impact of these public interventions in the sector is necessary.

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