

EMMANUEL MBETID-BESSANE
mbetid@hotmail.com
Université de Bangui, BP 1983,
Bangui, Central African
Republic

MICHEL HAVARD
michel.havard@cirad.fr
CIRAD, IRU Innovation and
Dynamics of Farming Systems
IRAD, BP 2572, Yaoundé,
Cameroon

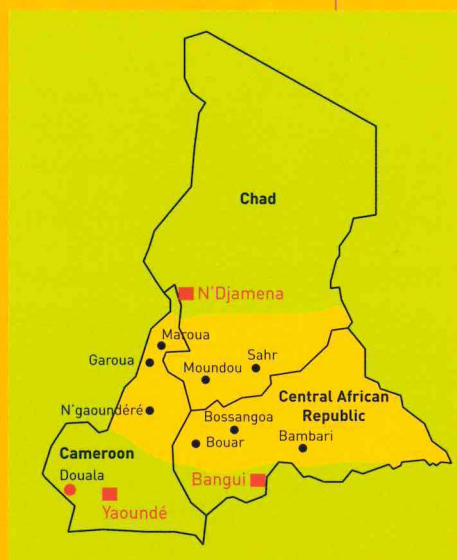
JEAN LEROY
leroyjeans@yahoo.fr
30, ruelle des Grelandières,
53000 Evron, France

DJONDANG KOYE
djondang_koye@yahoo.fr
ITRAD, Moundou, Chad



Farmers' strategies in Central African cotton-growing areas

In Central Africa, cotton development is tightly linked with the role of governments in providing technical support, credit for farmers and ensuring that farmers' harvested produce will be purchased at a fixed price. These government interventions began being questioned in the 1980s, however, because of the financial deficits, just at the time of the world cotton market crisis. Since then, cotton subsectors have been restructured, governments have withdrawn from their commitments, national cotton companies are being privatized and farmers are forming an increasing number of professional organizations. CIRAD and PRASAC, its Central African research and development partner, thus conducted an analysis of farmers' adaptation strategies within this setting.



Central African savannas
suitable for cotton cropping.

Cotton cropping from the farmer's standpoint

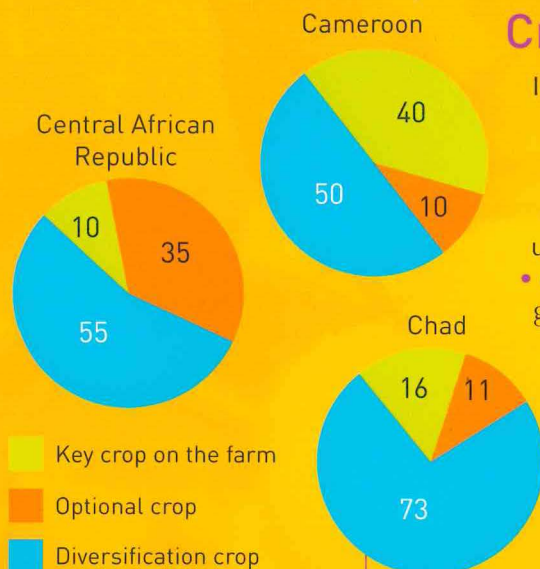
According to cotton producers, cotton cropping has developed through three main phases—cropping by colonial settlers prior to independence, cropping by traditional or administrative authorities after independence, and cropping by individual farmers as of the 1980s. The great cotton crisis began around 1985 when prices plummeted, followed by a roller-coaster type price pattern. Cotton is thus now considered as a risky crop. The drop in seed cotton purchase prices, sometimes with a concomitant rise in input prices, were the main features of the cotton crisis that affected farmers.

The current status of cotton in Central African production systems depends on the region and the type of farm considered. Cotton could potentially account for over a half of the farm income, despite the fact that yields of this crop are low and it is grown on less than a third of the total cropland. This contribution is very low in the Central African Republic, however, because farmers' activities are very diversified. In all cases, income from cotton enables farmers to invest in draught animals, livestock, homes and land, to pay back debts and even buy cereals, which is currently taking place on farms affected by food shortages in Cameroon and Chad.

Status of cotton on farms in Cameroon, Chad
and the Central African Republic

Farm characteristics	Cameroon	Central Africa Republic	Chad
N° of people	6 (incl. 3 workers)	6 (incl. 2.9 workers)	6.1 (incl. 3.3 workers)
Total cropping area (ha)	2.2	2.2	2.8
Area under cotton (% of total cropping area)	33	25	21
Seed cotton yield (kg/ha)	1 000	630	660
Total farm income (FCFA)	270 000	250 000	220 000
Income from cotton (% of total farm income)	60	15	52

Crisis adaptation strategies



Three crisis adaptation strategies of cotton farmers.

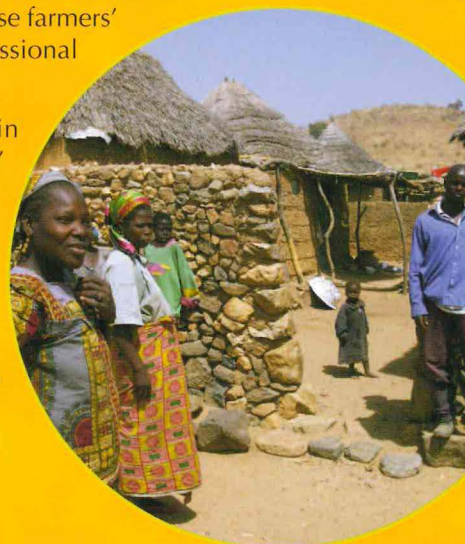
In all cases, the head of the farm decides on whether or not to grow cotton according to his/her own interest and pending opportunities. Under the current crisis, farmers first react individually by adjusting their activities to offset the market impact. There are three trends:

- farmers who consider cotton as the key crop in their production system. They usually manage large farms with many workers;
- opportunistic farmers whose strategy is not just focused on cotton cropping. They grow cotton when prices rise but not when they decline;
- farmers who consider cotton as a diversification crop. These farmers operate diversified farms and are the most numerous. They may reduce the cotton crop to focus on other activities, but still keep it for the fringe benefits.

From a collective standpoint, farmers benefit from mutual group solidarity in their adaptation initiatives, thus minimizing social costs associated with individual strategies. Farmers' organizations are formed to share resources among members, to coordinate activities and to have more clout when dealing with other operators in the subsector. These farmers' organizations are now beginning to closely resemble professional organizations.

In response to these different strategies, PRASAC, in partnership with CIRAD, development agencies and farmers' organizations, assessed various counselling schemes designed to help individual farmers and farmers' organizations adapt to changing patterns within the subsector.

A family of cotton farmers in northern Cameroon.
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Collection of harvested cotton at Léré, Chad.
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Partners

Chad: ITRAD, Institut tchadien de recherche agronomique pour le développement • PRASAC, Pôle de recherche appliquée au développement des savanes d'Afrique Centrale

Cameroon: IRAD, Institut de recherche agricole pour le développement

Central African Republic: ICRA, Institut centrafricain de recherche agricole



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For further information

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