

TRAINING OF COOPERATION AND AGRICULTURAL MUTUALITY OFFICERS IN FRENCH WEST AFRICA (1955-1958)

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Abstract: -

In the perspective of a rational exploitation of French West Africa colonies (FWA), the colonial administration considered to put right the "loss of balance" between the rural and urban world. To this end, it proceeded to training and integrating players responsible for promoting and developing the rural world: the cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers. This article therefore aims to present the training outlines and socio-professional integration of the cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers. To achieve this objective, archive folders of Q series (economic affair), the 5Q sub-series of the Senegal national archives, were exploited. The data in this series were criticized and cross-checked with scientific publications. Based on such a methodological approach, the research reveals, on the one hand, the motivations for training and, on the other hand, the recruitment of cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers. These are linked to the need to have senior African executives capable of supervising farmers and, by extension, to guide the cooperative structures with an agricultural vocation. Also, the training sessions organized in modules are tuned over time to consider the realities on the ground and needs. The reorientation of curricula and specialization of the training centers are made to consider agro-climatic conditions and cultural specificities of the agricultural regions.

Keywords: French West Africa – Training – Cooperative – Agricultural Mutuality – Development

INTRODUCTION

In the 1950s, the economic and social changes in French West Africa contributed to the production of an asymmetrical evolution between town and countryside. The economic imbalance between city dwellers and farmers was accentuated since the institution of labor law and the development of trade union movements had enabled urban workers to find a place, in a professional framework, capable of providing them with some guarantees of existence to which they aspired¹. Indeed, with the many union struggles, we were witnessing major legislative Acts leading to a relative improvement in their working conditions. Despite the misguided ways that had tempered this development with the general assembly of colonization, the rallying of workers sped up the adoption and promulgation of some laws in favor of African employees. Contrary to this evolution of city dwellers, the "rural masses", for the greater part "remained integrated into customary structures that were not conducive to rapid economic growth"². Since the 1930s, the rural areas of French West Africa, which were deeply involved in the production of export commodities, were far from always being subject to "rational, intensive, skillful exploitation". The traditional ways of "indigenous" culture still reigned almost everywhere. The FWA farmers found themselves through the economy of slave trade thus engaged in a commercial system which had broken the narrow circle of their traditional economy without them having fundamentally modified their farming methods (C. Robequain, 1937, p. 156).

The public authorities had then paid their attention to their situation which risked compromising "the harmonious development of French West Africa". Efforts were then made to give the peasant community the place it should have in the French West Africa's economy. This effort also aimed to raise the standard of living of agricultural producers both using modern agricultural techniques and through an organization capable of both popularizing production and organizing the agricultural profession. With such an objective, the training of agricultural executives capable of supervising the rural world was essential. This was the reason why the colonial administration thought of training officers for promotion and development of the rural world. Among these were the cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers, whose training and socio-professional integration between 1955 and 1958 constitute the subject of this study.

In 1955, federal cooperative training centers were created with the aim of building capacity of cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers. Three years later (1958), they ceased to function. Indeed, the French Union was replaced by the French Community, in which the Overseas Territories enjoyed internal autonomy (J-C. Barthélemy, 1980, p.302). Several agricultural structures were dissolved, and the training of cooperation and mutuality officers also came to an end. With this short duration of existence of this profession, a question in connection with their insertion deserves to be asked. In essence, it seems essential to know how the training and socio-professional integration of these agricultural development officers were performed and duplicated between 1955 and 1958?

The answer to this question requires a socio-historical analysis of the training and capacity building of the cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers. Indeed, this analysis is positioned at the crossroads of the sociology of work and development and, economic and social history. This study therefore mobilizes both sociological and historical considerations, the objective of which being to present the outline of training and socio-professional integration of the cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers, in a context marked by social changes and socio-political upheavals. To achieve this objective, files from the Q series (economic case) of the national archives of Senegal, the 5Q sub-series, were used. The data in this series have been criticized and cross-checked. Based on such a methodological approach, the analysis focuses first on the training challenges, then on the recruitment of trainees for cooperation and agricultural mutuality in FWA and finally on their training, support and socio-professional integration.

1. Training issues and trainees' recruitment for cooperation and agricultural mutuality in FWA

Essentially institutional and ideological issues presided over the recruitment of trainees for cooperation and agricultural mutuality in FWA. These issues then motivated a selective recruitment.

1-1- Training issues of the cooperation and mutuality officers in FWA

After having experimented with several methods, including that of production by constraint, to involve the African populations in the farming economy, the administration was now convinced that in terms of agricultural development, coercion could be by far the method which would give the best results. It now knew that to obtain satisfactory results, nothing could be done without the active and deliberate participation of the farmers. However, the question that remained of concern to it was that of their adherence to modern farming practices. Thus, for the colonial administration, the answer to this concern was through "cooperation, that is to say, by forming farmers' associations who united freely in order to

¹ 5Q 157 (130) French West Africa Directorate General for Economic Services and Planning. Federal service of the peasantry, the training of the agents of the cooperation and the agricultural naturalness in AOF provisional edition June 1957

² 5Q 157 (130) French West Africa Directorate General for Economic Services and Planning. Federal service of the peasantry, the training of the agents of the cooperation and the agricultural naturalness in AOF provisional edition June 1957

make the work of each less difficult and more productive³. However, the prevailing material conditions did not allow this ideal to be achieved. The farmers, in fact, were not equipped to organize cooperative life. They needed help. This was the reason why the general decree of August 24, 1953; then the decree issued in application of the framework law on November 13, 1956, had transformed the Provident Society (PS) into a Mutual Society for Rural Production (MSRP) and a Mutual Society for Rural Development (MSRD). In these two organizations for the promotion of rural development, the public authorities broke off its management power in favor of the elected Board of Directors and maintained only the control right necessary to avoid mistakes. The Boards of Directors of these structures implemented the aspirations of members expressed via a General Assembly or assemblies of elected sections. To help the mutuals in their economic action, the public authorities made technicians available to them, some of whom were ex-officio members of the Board of Directors.

With the training of cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers to lead the cooperatives, the administration hoped to obtain stable and productive structures, real cooperatives, and the MSRPs or National Societies for Rural Development (MSRD) were then considered to be cooperative unions. This progression of agricultural structures could not happen spontaneously. It then required the assistance of staff specially prepared to promote it. MSRP, MSRD and cooperative groups, affiliated or autonomous, needed to create within this organization of the rural world, officers capable of:

- managing their businesses in accordance with their directive.
- participating in the cooperative acculturation of members.
- advising their members in the construction of their career path.

This was the role which the training of cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers were prepared for. Their training was thus in line with the French policy of "rural rebuilding" based on rural animation and cooperative and mutualist movements" (J-P Chauveau, 1992, p.4).

1.2. Procedures for recruiting cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers

- The mode of recruitment of cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers was relatively selective, both in terms of application conditions and evaluation of officers to be recruited. About recruitment conditions, admission to a cooperative training center was subject to the following criteria:
- To be at least 20-35 years old.
- To hold at least a primary school certificate.
- To have fulfilled the obligations of military service.

In addition, the incumbent should not be a civil servant (unless expressly waived by the commander of the territory from which he comes). He had to commit to serving for at least 5 years in a cooperation organization or the agricultural mutuality.

About the application form, the incumbent should send a written request to the commander of the territory from which he originated or the territory in which he wished to serve. He had to attach to this application a resume indicating the name of the candidate, the studies he has completed and the diplomas he has obtained, the jobs he has performed, his family status, his military status, and his address. Some supporting documents had to be provided, namely the birth certificate or equivalent, the candidate's valid criminal record, statement of the military situation, and certified copies of the diplomas. He could possibly attach certified copies of work certificates, school attendance certificates and various references. Once these conditions have been met and after having passed the control exams, the training of the selected candidates could start.

2. Organization and evolution of the cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers' training.

The administration facilitated several class modules for the cooperation officers' training, which were subsequently revised.

2.1. Training modules and contents

The training of cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers took place in the federal cooperative training centers in two phases, which alternated the theoretical and practical phases. The courses given concerned agriculture, accounting, community communication and many other disciplines to give a wide range of skills to the trainees. The table below summarizes the disciplines taught and their hourly volume.

³ 5Q 157 (130) French West Africa Directorate General for Economic Services and Planning. Federal service of the peasantry, the training of the agents of the cooperation and the agricultural naturalness in AOF provisional edition June 1957

Table 1: Courses given to trainees from cooperation and agricultural mutuality

Order	Course title	Hourly volume
01	Rural Economy	10 hours
02	Cooperation	30 hours
03	Accounting	40 hours
04	Labor law	15 hours
05	General Agriculture	30 hours
06	Specialized Agriculture	40 hours
07	Livestock farming	15 hours
08	Forestry	10 hours
09	Fish farming	10 hours
10	Hydraulic Practices	10 hours
11	Topography	20 hours
12	Hygiene and first aid	10 hours
Total volume	Theory Courses	230 hours
	Practical activities	10 hours

Source: 5Q 157 (130) French West Africa Directorate General for Economic Services and Planning. Federal service of the peasant community, the training of the cooperation and the agricultural officers naturalness in FWA provisional edition June 1957.

As mentioned in Table 1; 230 hours of theoretical lessons and 10 hours of practical activities were provided to cooperation and agricultural mutuality trainees. The greater hourly volumes were those of general agriculture and specialized agriculture. These two disciplines combined 29% of the total hourly volumes insofar as the trainees were called upon to carry out, at the end of their training, the supervision of agricultural production.

In addition to agriculture courses, which occupied the highest rate, there are also accounting courses which represented 17% of the hourly volume of theoretical courses with 40 hours. This importance given to accounting was linked to the fact that the trainees had to keep the accounts of cooperative agricultural structures such as: the SMPs or the SNDRs⁴. These courses were supplemented by practical internships. For instance, the 1956-1957 internships, after adjustments due to the experience of those of 1955-1956 and the approval of the Federal Committee for Cooperation, took place as follows: “The Sikasso and Bongouanou practical courses were to be opened on November 14, 1956, with 13 trainees while the Sikasso center had 20. Part of the practical activities of the Bongouanou trainees would take place in Tiébissou, a region offering more varied agricultural resources, to enable trainees to acquire knowledge in all the activities they were likely to encounter in the south of the federation. These internships, which extended over six months, were to end on March 15, 1957⁵.

To evaluate the candidates, a joint validation commission was created in June 1957.

2.3. Training reorientation and training centers specialization

2.3.1. Training reorientation from 1957

As part of the cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers’ training, “intermediate judging panel” met periodically to take stock of the training provided. Also, the “intermediate panel” of February 23, 1957⁶, noted a significant improvement in the quality of the training given to cooperation officers. However, weaknesses to be corrected were noted. It was then underlined training inadequacy in accounting and management, due to too short and too fast teaching. The training reorientation then concerned content reinforcement in terms of agricultural training for trainees called upon to work in permanent contact with rural areas. The heterogeneity of recruitments due to differences in age, origins and levels of general education was also a question at the heart of the evaluators’ concerns⁷. But the concern for age heterogeneity was ultimately not considered a weakness in recruitment.

After an inspection by the administrator Cuny, head of the federal service of the peasant community and his comments, new arrangements were made. To make the training more practical, the administrative authorities adopted training

⁴ 5Q 157 (130) French West Africa Directorate General for Economic Services and Planning. Federal service of the peasantry, the training of the agents of the cooperation and the agricultural naturalness in AOF provisional edition June 1957.

⁵ 5Q57, Note for the Director General of Economic Services and Planning, February 1, 1957. Subject: 5th FIDES common section train. Financing of cooperative training centers reference note n°573/ coop of December 22, 1956 and n° 10 of January 11, 1957.

⁶ 5Q57 (130) Governor of Côte d'Ivoire. Local director of economic services (Abidjan Cooperation and Mutuality Services, April 1957. Purpose of future organization of federal cooperative training courses.

⁷ 5Q57 (130) Governor of Côte d'Ivoire. Local director of economic services (Abidjan Cooperation and Mutuality Services, April 1957.

twinning of the agricultural senior staff of the Bingerville technical college with that of the cooperation seniors of Tiebissou. For a rapid allocation of funds, to carry out training activities without delay, the decentralization of credits from the Investment Fund for Economic and Social Development (IFESD) intended for the Tiébissou center was adopted⁸. In addition to these rearrangements, the FWA administrative authorities opted for a specialization of the training centers.

2.3.2. The specialization of training centers

Training centers were specialized according to agro-climatic conditions and cultural specificities. Also, for crops in areas with a dry and hot climate, the Sahelo-Saharan regions, the Sikasso Center was open to trainees from Upper Volta, Upper Ivory Coast, northern Dahomey, Upper Guinea, Mauritania. This center recruited only trainees coming from these regions or to serve there. Candidates from Sudan, Niger and possibly Senegal were also directed to Sikasso.

Conversely, the Tiébissou and Bongouanou Training Centers remained open to trainees from the forest-growing areas of Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Dahomey, or called upon to serve there. Considering agricultural specificities, a third cooperative training center was opened in Senegal in 1957-1958, specially intended for staff to serve in the peanut regions. From now on, the cooperation's trainees benefited from reinforced agricultural education. To this end, in Sudan, the agricultural technical college of Katibougou was called upon to train and build officers' capacities. Similarly in Cote d'Ivoire, the Bingerville technical college was called upon to train the Tiebissou-Bongouanou cooperation managers. In Bingerville, the Federal Service head of the peasant community and the General Inspector representative of agriculture were then in charge of the project implementation.

3. Support and socio-professional integration of cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers

3.1 Trainees handling by the colonial administration

About social care, the trainees benefited from accommodation and food at the boarding school. The center administrators gave them school and work kits. For those who were not accommodated in a boarding school, free of charge transport from home to the center was provided. A monthly scholarship was awarded to trainees. The amount of this was XOF 3,000 per month for single people and XOF5,000 per month for married people without children, while married people with children received XOF7,000 per month. The trainees' mutual employees or, exceptionally, civil servants admitted to training continued to receive their salaries and allowances from their employers; and could not therefore claim to benefit from this grant.

The center was financed via the FWA general government resources, those of the colonies of the group and via IFESD. The fund has been created since 1946 (Anonymous, 1957, p.48). IFESD funding was as follows:

Table 2: IFESD funding for the training of cooperation and agricultural mutuality managers (1955-1958)

Expense item	Amount
Infrastructures & equipment cost, building- school (3rd series)	8 500 000
	3 500 000
Permanent equipment	5 000 000
Accommodation for all center managers (4th series)	4 000 000
Additional equipment	
TOTAL	21 000 000

Source: 5Q57 Note for the Managing Director of Economic Services (planning department) November 14, 1956.

Operating expenses for the years 1955/1956 for the 3rd IFESD series represented XOF4,300,000 for 26 trainees. It was planned in 1956 -1957 under the 4th FIDES series XOF10,000,000 for 40 trainees. This amount was allocated to several expenditure items for which the fixed operating costs represented XOF1,800,000. Supervision represented XOF1,600,000 and maintenance costs for trainees totaled XOF5,400,000; while the transport costs represented a sum of XOF1,200,000⁹.

⁸ 5Q57 correspondence from Mr. Cuny to Mr. Barlet Director of the Côte d'Ivoire government cooperation service April 1, 1957.

⁹ 5Q57 Note for the Director General of Economic Services (planning department) November 14, 1956.

On November 14, 1956, the Managing Director of Economic Services and Planning requested financial support for the 5th IFESD series an amount of XOF10 million as first emergency for internships financing from October 1957 to May 1958, in the Sikasso and Bongouanou training centers¹⁰.

The cooperation department also requested for registration on the 5th IFESD series as first emergency, a loan of XOF10 million to finance the internship at the Nioro center and the Sikasso and Bongouanou-Tiébissou training centers¹¹. In addition, an amount of XOF15,500,000 was mobilized for the creation and operation of a third center in Senegal. The opening of this center was decided by the Federal Committee for Agricultural Cooperation and Agricultural Credit on October 26, 1956 and confirmed by the Governor General on December 17, 1956¹².

The loans allocated by IFESD to federal cooperative training centers for internships in 1957 were distributed as follows:

Table 3: IFESD credits allocated to federal cooperative training centers in 1957

	Amount
Equipment and internship costs	
Equipment cost in Senegal center	5 500 000
	4 250 000
Sikasso Center internship fees	
Bongouanou Center fees	4 250 000

5Q57 Note for the Managing Director of Economic Services and Planning February 1, 1957. Subject: 5th IFESD common section series. Financing cooperative training centers reference note n°573/ coop of December 22, 1956, and n° 10 of January 11, 1957.

The Senegal center's course fees (5,500,000 francs) were higher than those of the other two centers due to frequent travel of the trainees during the peanut trade and to various agricultural organizations. Moreover, these trips enabled to avoid permanent infrastructure expenditure. From the perspective of a match between training and employment, the cooperation and mutuality officers were assured of professional integration.

3.2. Professional guarantees of cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers

The training of cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers was initiated in line with FWA colony's needs that were to employ them. At the end of the training/employment process, trainees holding the Cooperation Officer Certificate were guaranteed to have a job in the agricultural sector of their territory of origin. Particularly, he could serve in a mutual organization as a rural assistant. They could also be entrusted in this capacity with the administrative responsibility of a rural economic community or the management of an agricultural cooperative, affiliated to a Mutual Society for Rural Promotion (MSRP) or to a National Society for Rural Development (NSRD)¹³. These structures presented themselves as decentralized economic communities, production improving nuclei, centers for rural expansion. They could also hold the position of assistant agriculture driver, or that of African IFESD supervisors¹⁴.

The FWA administration planned a "reasonable career development, giving them access to the higher categories, after some times, ". Moreover, to respond to a "legitimate concern for stability and a normal desire for professional and retirement guarantees", the administration considered affiliating them to a mutual insurance system covering illness and family risks and opening a right to a pension. at the end of their career. The administration was then thinking of the "*Caisse Régionale d'Assurance Mutuelle Agricole*" "FWA Assurance", which was reinsured by the "*Caisse Centrale de Réassurance des Mutuelles Agricoles de l'Afrique du Nord*". According to the administration, this structure was qualified to make concrete proposals for setting up an insurance plan that could also be extended to all SP or MSRP staff¹⁵.

¹⁰ 1Q57 Note for the Director General of Economic Services and Planning Subject: FIDES 5th train program. Training of reference cooperation frameworks, note n°482/coop of November 14, 1956.

¹¹The formation was done in an alternative way in these two localities. Also the colonial administration combined the names of these two localities.

¹² 5Q57 Note for the Director General of Economic Services and Planning February 1, 1957 Subject: 5th FIDES common section train. Financing of cooperative training centers reference note n°573/ coop of December 22, 1956 and n° 10 of January 11, 1957.

¹³ 5Q 157 (130) French West Africa Directorate General for Economic Services and Planning. Federal service of the peasantry, the training of the agents of the cooperation and the agricultural naturalness in AOF provisional edition June 1957.

¹⁴5Q57 (130) Governor of Côte d'Ivoire. Local Director of Economic Services (Cooperation and Mutuality Services Abidjan on.... April 1957.Subject: Future organization of federal cooperative training courses

¹⁵ Ibid

Conclusion

The training of cooperation and agricultural mutuality officers in French West Africa between 1955 and 1958 was part of the French policy logic of rural rebuilding based on rural animation in support of cooperative and mutualist movements. This andragogical training was to fill the void caused by the lack of senior African agricultural staff capable of leading cooperatives and promoting the development of rural world. In view of these objectives, the mode of recruitment of these rural development players was relatively selective, both in terms of recruitment conditions and final evaluation. To achieve its objective, the colonial administration evaluated the training before proceeding with the orientation of the agricultural staff. It was in this capacity that the training centers were specialized according to agro-climatic conditions and cultural specificities. In this dynamic, the Sikasso training center specializes in crops from hot and dry climate zones in the Sahelo-Saharan regions. For the purposes of this objective, it welcomed trainees from Upper Volta, Upper Cote d'Ivoire, Northern Dahomey, Upper Guinea, and Mauritania. Unlike, the Tiebissou and Bongouanou Centers specialized in teaching agricultural techniques in forest areas. As such, it welcomed trainees from Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Dahomey, or called to serve there. In 1957-1958 a third cooperative training center in Senegal specialized in training of personnel to serve in the peanut-producing regions.

Trainees holding the Cooperation Officer Certificate were guaranteed employment in a mutual organization as a Rural Assistant or administrative manager of a rural economic community or an agricultural cooperative, affiliated to a Mutual Society of Rural Promotion. (MRPS). This training reflects the alignment of the training / employment system initiated by the FWA colonial administration, from 1955 to 1958.

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