

THE PRESENT EXPLOITATION OF AGRICULTURAL SECTOR AND THE INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN ZAIRE

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ABSTRACT The agricultural sector of Zaire offers a great deal of development potential as regards employment, GDP growth and export revenues. However, this sector has faced many serious problems caused by the economic and political exploitation. This paper analyzes the obstacles facing the development of the agricultural sector in Zaire, efforts so far made by local communities and grassroots organizations, such as cooperatives.

Key Words: Agricultural development; Agrarian crisis; Politico-commercial bourgeoisie; Zaire; Agricultural cooperatives.

THE PROBLEM OF AGRICULTURE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Agriculture is still the principal component of economic development in most African countries. The following arguments can be advanced to support this assertion:

- (1) Except for some mineral and oil exporting countries, most African countries receive their foreign currency mainly from agricultural exports. For instance, Chad and Sudan receive 97% of their export-earnings from agriculture.
- (2) The agricultural sector contributes more than 40% of the GDP in many African countries (Burundi, 65%; Ethiopia, 56%; Gambia, 58%).
- (3) The agricultural population still remains very high (Burkina, 87%; Tanzania, 86%; Senegal, 80%; Rwanda, 93%).
- (4) The industrial sector is still embryonic in Africa and needs a dynamic agriculture for capital accumulation as both raw materials and finance.

Consequently, it is absurd to think of development in Africa without an adequate agricultural policy, as it is currently the case in many countries. In 1988, more than 20 countries in Africa, particularly the Sahelian countries and Ethiopia, had to deal with starvation, while, malnutrition, in particular, for small children, is almost a generalized phenomenon. The United Nations statistics show that Sub-Saharan African is the only region of the world where per capita food production has declined over the past twenty years. Indeed, between 1970 and 1978, Sub-Saharan African annual per capita food production fell – 1.3% (Gakou, 1984).

Table 1 provides data about per capita food production in Sub-Saharan countries. Countries belonging to Group A have an average per capita food production index of 106, higher than the index of the base period (1969–1971 = 100). But they also recorded a high annual demographic growth rate of 3.9%. Among countries of Group B, the demographic growth rate is 2.4% per year, while the average index

Table 1. Indices of per capita food production (1969–1971 = 100) and population growth rate in some African countries (1982).

		Indices of food production	Population growth rate
A Group	Guinea	101	2.3
	Cote d'Ivoire	123	3.6
	Kenya	102	4.1
	Liberia	106	3.2
	Malawi	102	6.3
	Rwanda	103	4.1
	Average	106	3.9
	B Group	Benin	97
Burundi		96	2.4
Cameroon		97	1.9
Madagascar		81	2.6
Nigeria		84	3.4
Sierra Leone		90	1.8
Sudan		96	2.2
Tanzania		88	2.3
Burkina Faso		90	1.8
Zaire		92	2.8*
Zambia		83	2.3
Zimbabwe		82	2.7
Average		90	2.4
C Group		Angola	70
	Ethiopia	68	2.7
	Ghana	65	3.2
	Mali	69	2.5
	Mozambique	72	3.2
	Niger	72	2.8
	Senegal	76	3.5
	Togo	79	2.1
	Uganda	79	3.5
	Average	72	2.9

Source: Sakamoto, 1987; *: DADR, 1986.

of per capita food production at 90, decreased, compared to the base period. Zaire belongs to this group with an index of 92 and a demographic growth rate of 2.8% per year. However, in Zaire's case, foodstuffs, except cassava, have not recorded any increase, but, on the contrary, a diminution of total production in absolute terms. The situation is the worst in countries of Group C with a demographic growth rate of 2.9% per year and a food production index below 80.

Some studies emphasize population growth as the explanation of this food crisis, and privilege family planning policies as a means to overcome the situation (Jansen, 1987). However, the demographic pressure does not give a satisfactory answer to the agrarian crisis in Africa because there is sufficient potential arable land and underpopulation in many areas. In addition, the situation in A group countries belies the Malthusian correlation between demographic growth and food supplies in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Other factors have been advanced to explain the food crisis in Africa. Commins (1986: 6) assessed the academic and professional literature on this topic in "exter-

nalist-internalist" categories: "Broadly speaking, externalists are inclined to place primary emphasis on causal factors outside Africa and, therefore, beyond the jurisdiction of its political systems, while internalists place greater emphasis on the policy of African governments."

Derriennic's analysis of the famine in Sahel (Derriennic, 1977) showed that from 1965 to 1974 the regional food output was relatively good, but the peasant community could not stock the surplus in anticipation of poor harvests and climatic perturbations which were not unusual in the region. Then, famines occur because of taxes, governmental marketing boards, low agricultural prices, etc., which lock the peasant community in a vicious circle of dependence and poverty.

Factors such as the decline of terms of trade for primary commodities in the world market, the burden of external debt, drought and other natural calamities, civil wars, environmental degradation (e.g. deforestation), etc. have been widely commented by different authors to explain the current agrarian crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa (Borton & Clay, 1988).

Nevertheless, the inadequate economic policies followed by most African countries, stressing their investment effort on the mining sector rather than on agriculture, or concentrating agricultural investment on cash crop production rather than on food production excludes peasants from the development process for the benefit of plantations and large-scale farms. have had a massive negative impact on agricultural development in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In spite of repeated political declarations and so-called Rural Development Programs, African peasants, who constitute the majority, remain very poor. For instance, in Zaire's case, the rural per capita revenue is about 10 times lower than the urban per capita income. Poverty in African rural areas is largely a result of a the low land productivity, while the agricultural sector still remains the main source of income for the rural economy. It is curious that most African countries, with an agricultural population representing more than 70% of the population are unable to meet national food requirement.

On the other hand, in developed countries, less than 10% (3.1% in the United States) of the economically active population produces enough to feed all of their populations, to export and to aid Africa and other developing countries.

This situation contrasts sharply with the fact that Africa has 25% of the world potential arable land, while its population represents only 10% of the world population. This obvious gap between the agricultural situation in Africa and that of industrialized countries can be explained, partially, by the technical and scien-

Table 2. Agricultural labour force and output per worker in some regions of the world.

Regions	Agricultural labour force as percentage of total labour force (%)	Agricultural output per agricultural worker (Units)
Africa	72.4	0.2
North America	3.1	25.7
Eastern Europe & USSR	23.9	2.0
Western Europe	12.7	3.6

Source: La-Anyane, 1985.

tific gap concerning means of production utilized in these countries. Table 2 illustrates this gap and the weakness of Africa's agricultural productivity.

Low production in African agriculture is largely due to a generalized use of archaic tools such as hoe, machete, spade, which prevent peasants from realizing important investments. But we must also carefully analyze why peasants, for a long time and in spite of massive social, political, and economic changes, still continue to use these tools and, then, are denied access to improved techniques.

Further, a rural exodus, especially among younger generations who refuse to engage themselves in hard agricultural work is also a cause of the current crisis. Thus, the rural population engaged in agriculture decreases while the urban population increases. In many cases, the urban population includes the unemployed who must be fed.

It is also meaningful that peasants accept hardship to provide a relatively good education for their children, not to become progressive or prosperous farmers, but, on the contrary, to avoid low social status in their community.

Peasant agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa, based on a fallow system, faces demographic pressures which reduce the fallow period and, then, induce ecological disasters, due to the deforestation and the cultivation of poor, marginal lands. The severe soil erosion experienced in the South Kivu (Zaire) was caused by over cultivation in an overpopulated area.

Under these conditions, a meaningful effort should be made to understand the nature of peasant agriculture, the reasons for the current crisis and what should be done to improve agricultural productivity in order to achieve integral economic development in Zaire. This paper attempts to provide a comprehensive model of agricultural development in Zaire.

FORMAL EXPLANATION OF AGRICULTURAL COLLAPSE IN ZAIRE

The agricultural crisis which has plagued the country for many years has been explained in various ways by the national ruling class and by specialists of Zaire economy. Below, I summarize the obstacles analyze their impact on the current situation of Zairian agriculture. Understanding the meaning of government rhetoric about the current situation will be an important part to overcome this crisis.

The official explanation of the agricultural crisis, and the proposed strategy to deal with this crisis seem to be clear cut. However, we must ask why agriculture still continues to be neglected in spite of political declarations which have recognized the strategic importance of this sector. What are the causes of agricultural collapse? In other words, are the official explanations adequate to understand the current crisis?

Of course, problems such as transportation infrastructure, agricultural research, an inappropriate educational system and lack of financial means are real and cannot be minimized. However, the present agricultural crisis is not a result of these isolated causes, but of their cumulative and mutual effects. The main explanation of agricultural collapse lies in the politics of the present Zairian state, which is used as an instrument of wealth accumulation and domination by politicians, themselves

businessmen.

THE POLITICO-COMMERCIAL BOURGEOISIE AND THE AGRICULTURAL CRISIS IN ZAIRE

The causes of the agricultural crisis, and the mechanisms of its regeneration and perpetuation are better understood when we consider motives which have led the Zairian state, since independence, to deliberately neglect the agricultural sector, or act against peasant interests. The contemporary orientation of the economic policy which has plunged agriculture into unprecedented depression can be understood only if we consider the situation of a minority ruling class in power since independence. The personal interests of the political and commercial bourgeoisie, its reactions to the agricultural crisis and its role as a ruling class must be the main components to an understanding of relationships between peasants and the Zairian state, and why government rhetoric for more than 30 years has not produced any positive results for peasants.

Indeed, we know that official arguments about the agricultural crisis in Zaire, up to now, has carefully eliminated any reference to the responsibility of the national bourgeoisie. The reason is that the ruling class in power, which finances and controls the research network, cannot allow any allusion to its role as a dominant social group. Except for a few scientists such as Kankwenda (1983), Peemans (1981) and Longandjo (1985), the analysis of the Zairian economic crisis, conducted under the supervision of the ruling bourgeoisie, has limited itself to the superficial causes and has wittingly been unable to explain why agriculture has faced a structural crisis since independence.

During the colonial era, Zairian agriculture was assigned double objectives: To supply manpower for mining, transportation and industry, and to cheaply feed urban populations. The two objectives could be efficiently reached by means of the strong physical constraints exerted by the colonial administration which prevented migration from rural regions to the cities.

Since 1960, as agriculture failed to supply sufficient food to urban centres, they have had to rely mostly on imports, especially fish, meat and rice, while a rural exodus has been almost impossible to stop. The current weakness of the administrative apparatus has resulted in a high level of despotism and corruption which eventually contributed to the disorganisation of the agricultural sector and an unprecedented rate of rural exodus.

To solve the crisis, or rather to "manage" it as once said by Kankwenda (1983), the ruling class has decided to resort to palliative solutions which exclude peasants. For instance, there has been the model of "development agreements" (conventions de développement) which requested the industries (especially breweries and tobacco producers) themselves to produce the agricultural raw materials they need or to provide food for their work force in order to avoid expensive food import (in the case of Gecamines, the biggest mining firm in Zaire). Some firms such as Gecamines, Renault-Zaire and Sodimiza did produce foodstuffs such as maize.

Thus the Zairian state prefers the capitalist firms to peasant agriculture to solve

the agricultural crisis. Then, the available financial means are concentrated within the modern sector. The agricultural plan elaborated by the Ministry of Agriculture (DADR, 1982) relied exclusively on capitalist mining companies and large-scale farms. The agricultural projects financed with resources from foreign countries (France, Belgium, USA, Japan, West Germany) and from international organizations (World Bank, FAO and PNUD) have concerned oil palm products (Equateur), cotton and sugar-cane (Bas-Zaïre). These projects only enlarged the external debt, while other agricultural output has not increased. Peasants, who have not benefited from these external financial resources, must support the hard conditions of debt repayment and economic recession.

Van der Steen (1977) has noticed that the large-scale projects financed by foreign countries that call for tractors and sophisticated materials as well as highly qualified foreign technicians tend to attract Zaïrian policy makers. The real cost of these projects is easily deflated by state subsidies and foreign aid. When these subsidies and aid end, the project cannot continue and collapses.

Boutrais described the agricultural policy in Africa as "an agriculture without peasants" (Boutrais, 1982: 51–54). Peasants are excluded from the process of agricultural development for the benefit of industrial and commercial capitalism. Indeed, the commercial bourgeoisie has actually a vested interest in the commerce of peasant production and acquires huge profits by buying at very low prices and selling at very high prices in the urban markets. The liberalization of agricultural prices in Zaïre has reduced the agriculture to its current role of enriching a parasitical urban bourgeoisie.

Generally, peasants sell their product to and receive loans from the same middleman. They are then exploited by means of low agricultural prices, prohibitive loan interests and the high price of manufactured goods.

There is a big gap between official minimum prices and the very low prices actually paid to peasants. Official agricultural prices, already low compared to prices of manufactured commodities paid by peasants, are ignored by the monopolistic traders who also receive excessive returns from urban consumers.

The profit margin taken by the commercial bourgeoisie cannot be explained only by the degradation of the transport infrastructure. We must consider the fact that prices are fixed by the Ministry of National Economy and by the association of Zaïrian traders, ANEZA (Association Nationale des Entreprises du Zaïre). The peasants' interests are not represented in this process. The peasant situation is worsened by inflation: The average index of retail prices has increased from 100 in 1970 to 18,519 in 1984 (Gamela, et. al., 1987). These sky-high prices in the market do not reflect per capita revenue. The standard of living has dramatically gone down both in urban centres and in rural areas.

While prices of agricultural products in rural areas have been maintained at a very low level, urban consumers must pay dearly for the same products. Verhaegen (1973) has estimated that the prices of agricultural products such as cassava, maize, peanuts and oil palm paid by the consumer were 3–10 times higher than prices received by producers. Vegetables from North Kivu sold in the Kinshasa market were 30–40 times higher than peasant prices.

Both peasants and urban consumers are victims of pricing practiced by the com-

mercial bourgeoisie who are the only beneficiaries. Why has the Zairian government not attempted to change this situation? Indeed, the political bourgeoisie which has ruled the country since 1960 does not have a self-sufficient economic base to support its domination and to reinforce its position as the intermediary between the local population and international capitalism. This class depends on public resources for its wealth accumulation. As the Zairian government has received more than 80% of its resources since 1960 from the mining sector, the ruling class strives to control this sector.

The control of state resources provides the Zairian political class with an economic base in three ways: high salaries, bribes and embezzlement. For instance, Peemans (1981) estimated that in 1980, more than 60% of Zaire's ordinary budget was embezzled and, in 1982, Zaire's president also disclosed that 50% of the annual budget of eight billion Zaires was embezzled. Furthermore, Verhaegen (1978) analyzed how the political bourgeoisie, through corruption, accumulated its wealth in negotiating with foreign countries. The political class finds opportunities where foreign investments, cooperation projects or equipment supplies are concerned. We can now understand why very expensive, inappropriate and needless projects such as the giant Inga dam, the Inga-Shaba power line, and the Maluku steel mill (Siderurgie de Maluku) have been accepted by the ruling class.

The nationalization measures (Zairianisation, 1973; Radicalisation, 1974) were as an attempt to constitute an economic base for the political bourgeoisie. This class did not have a regular source of wealth accumulation, nor could it find one in the financial or industrial sector where the foreign interests were strong. Commerce and agriculture were the only sectors considered easy to confiscate.

The analysis by Longandjo on the relations of social groups in Zaire makes clear that responsibilities lie with the commercial and political bourgeoisie which utilize the Zairian state as an instrument of wealth accumulation in the current agricultural crisis. The commercial bourgeoisie has control over the means of production, capital, and the employed mass. This bourgeoisie can also mobilize peasants and unemployed masses for its own profit.

But this system works successfully on the condition that the state intervenes to secure the bourgeoisie's interests. The main vocation of this state is to mobilize material and human resources for the benefit of the national bourgeoisie and foreign investors. The state mobilizes the peasants' surplus by fixing very low agricultural prices which are undercut by traders in order to insure the commercial bourgeoisie's wealth. Agricultural price levels constitute a concrete proof of the State's role as an instrument devoted to mobilize local resources, especially from agriculture, for the benefit of the commercial bourgeoisie.

The problem with this kind of "compradore bourgeoisie" is that it is a consumer bourgeoisie as opposed to the producer bourgeoisie in capitalist developed countries. This social class has accumulated wealth through corruption, high salaries and embezzlement of public funds. The capital accumulated by these means is mostly kept abroad in foreign currency, invested in speculative activities in the country or consumed in ostentatious expenditures.

This compradore bourgeoisie managed the country since independence. So it is natural that agriculture should have been neglected for the benefit of the mining

sector which insures the state's revenue and the wealth of the ruling class. We can understand why agriculture is "milked" without any concern for its regeneration.

We can now understand why peasants are sometimes reluctant to increase their production and why agriculture faces a serious crisis nowadays. Under these conditions, peasant interests do not prevail among policy makers. On the contrary, they are exploited by low agricultural prices and compulsory cultivation for the benefit of the commercial bourgeoisie. Peasants, when the gap between agricultural prices and other commodities ties is largely unfavourable to them, prefer to produce strictly for their own consumption because profit from commercial surplus is not proportional to the additional effort. This is particularly the case in remote areas which have few exchanges with urban centres.

Peasants who can sell their products in good conditions and obtain valuable revenue can adjust their prices to the evolution of the general index. This is the case in Regions such as Bas-Zaïre and Bandundu which have good transportation and are well connected to Kinshasa. In these areas, peasants are interested in producing for more than self-sufficiency and can bargain over prices. However, this happens only for foodstuffs, and not for cash crops. In mining regions, where diamond and gold can be exploited, agriculture is abandoned for the profit of this traffic. Though agricultural prices steadily increase, the young generations do not accept farm work and, in many cases, school attendance is considered a waste of time. This is the case in Regions such as Kasai (diamond) and Shabunda, Walikala in Kivu (gold).

In the face of the declining capacity of the state for development, if not its negative attitude concerning peasant agriculture, ordinary people have developed "survival strategies" (Nzongola, 1986). In rural areas, peasants reaction consists of a passive resistance or of complete isolation from state institutions and activities. We also notice the proliferation of religious groups, such as "Kitawala" or "Monama," which constitute, in fact, movements of political resistance. For instance, Kitawala, the millenarian movement which existed during the colonial period and was aimed at removing the colonizers through magic, is still popular in Zaïre.

To conclude, I may state that the agricultural crisis in Zaïre is not accidental but results from the policy defined and executed by the ruling bourgeoisie to further their personal interests. Hence, formal and governmental causes of this agricultural crisis, only partially explain the reality of the agricultural sector and must be considered as secondary, subordinate or even aggravating factors. The main explanation of this crisis, without minimizing the perverse effects of problems such as transportation infrastructure, agricultural research and educational system, consists of the economic policy followed by the comprador bourgeoisie. In the following section I analyze the situation of agricultural cooperatives in Zaïre because they are generally considered to be grassroots institutions which have achieved drastic changes in the rural development process of various countries, in both developed and developing economies.

ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF ZAIRIAN COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT

Cooperatives have remote antecedents in the African traditional society. For instance, the communal ownership of land and the social security system are elements of the traditional society in Africa. The solidarity which arose from them might be considered as the roots for cooperatives in Africa. However, the modern cooperative movement was introduced in most African countries during the colonial era as a new type of organization with its principles and history. Below, I describe how cooperatives were introduced in Zaire during the colonial period and analyze their current situation.

I. Zairian Cooperative Movement during the Colonial Period

During colonial rule, there were two categories of cooperatives in Zaire: Cooperatives of European settlers and cooperatives of African small-scale farmers. Settler cooperatives were exclusively involved in cash crops for export. They aimed to protect their members from the instability of agricultural prices in the international market. Thus, settlers were grouped by crop. For instance, coffee producers created a cooperative in 1934 in Uele (Haut-Zaire), while fruit producers founded a fruit cooperative in 1947 (*La societe cooperative des producteurs de fruits du Bas-Congo: Copofruit*). Oil palm producers also created a cooperative in 1948 called Congo-Palme (*la societe cooperative des producteurs et exportateurs d'huile de palme du Congo Belge*). Congokina (*societe cooperative des producteurs de quinquina*), was established by the owners of quinquina plantations in 1947 in Kivu Province. Through these cooperatives, settlers could monopolise the marketing of cash crops. Most cooperatives successfully accumulated wealth to the benefit of their members.

About 4% of the peasant population was in cooperatives before 1960. Colonial administration assisted in their management. They efficiently acted to provide peasants with manufactured goods (25–30% lower than trader prices) and regularly bought peasant produce. Until 1955, there was a small number of cooperatives and the whole movement was at an experimental stage. For instance, in 1954, there were only 39 peasant cooperatives. Cash crop cooperatives made up more than 90% of the total number of cooperatives. These cooperatives were also concentrated in cash crop producer areas. About 80% of the cooperative members lived in the provinces of Kivu and Haut-Zaire where the plantation agriculture was most developed (Glinne, 1956).

After 1956, the cooperative movement did not expand. In 1959, out of an agricultural population estimated at 5,801,756, only 197,621 peasants, 3.4% of the peasant population, joined cooperatives (Ndongala, 1966).

Peasant cooperatives were linked to group called "Paysannats" and were relatively well managed by Belgian officials. They also provided peasants with services such as drinking water and public health. Associations such as Cogerc (Comite de gerance de la caisse de reserves du coton), and FBI (Fonds du bien-etre Indigene) provided loans to cooperatives in order to extend their activities among peasants. From 1949 to 1956, credit given to cooperatives represented 38,499,355

Frs, of which 36,547,000 were devoted to rural cooperatives (Callier, 1958). These loans were used to improve the storage system and housing, and to supply peasants with agricultural inputs and consumer goods.

However, colonial cooperatives did not concern peasant education and training. Also Zairians were confined to subordinate jobs. When Belgian cooperative officials departed after independence, the cooperative movement in Zaire collapsed after 1960. This was due to the lack of qualified local managers. Colonial cooperatives did not attempt to transform the dualistic structures which still characterize Zairian agriculture today.

Broadly, cooperatives were utilized according to the colonial objectives. Cooperatives had to maintain rural populations in their native places to avoid a rural exodus. They also had to influence peasants to produce more for the urban market and to provide settlers with cash crops. They were an instrument of economic promotion only for settlers. Peasant cooperatives were tolerated only when they did not compete with European interests. In general, settlers were opposed to the extension of the cooperative movement for Africans.

Thus, peasant cooperatives did not promote the social and economic position of the peasant community. After 1960, Zairian officials, without any management experience, had to replace Belgian managers. The consequence was the liquidation of most colonial cooperatives as explained in the following section.

II. Current Situation of the Cooperative Movement in Zaire

Agricultural policy of independent Zaire seems to be, in most of its aspects, a continuation of the colonial policy. Its main objective is to provide urban areas with food crops and produce cash crops for national industries and export in a way that maximizes the financial profits of the national bourgeoisie and foreign investors. The contradiction between these implicit objectives and peasant interests explains why peasants mistrust cooperatives, particularly when initiated by the government.

Also, the fact that the decree of March 24, 1956 still legislates Zairian cooperatives is considered proof that cooperatives in the post-independence years continue to operate in a colonial view of contempt and exploitation of the peasant community. Attempts to modify this legislation have not succeeded since the agricultural policy which sustains it has not changed. Thus, cooperatives in the post-independence years do not play the important role of mobilizing peasant resources and energy to attain agricultural development.

Another feature of the cooperative movement in the post-independence years concerns the active involvement of foreign aid agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGO) in promoting peasant associations in rural areas. This situation contrasts with the inert attitude of the state towards rural development programs. Thus, these agencies and NGO's have replaced local administration in crucial matters, such as the construction and maintenance of roads, the supply of agricultural inputs, extension work, and health.

For example, a Canadian aid agency called SOCODEVI (Societe de Cooperation et de Development International) has been very active in the North Kivu province.

It provided 24 primary cooperatives (2,234 members) under a cooperative union with extension workers, materials, and road maintenance. This program cost CS 1 million from 1987 to 1991 (SOCODEVI, 1986).

Zairian cooperatives are single-purpose institutions without links among them. Their main activities concern agricultural supply, fishing, breeding, handicraft, savings, and credit. According to information collected from extension workers and my own field research, many cooperatives are actually private businesses trying to evade taxes or gain subsidies. A mere increase in the number of cooperatives is misleading because official reports recognized that 172 cooperatives in 1972 and 75 cooperatives in 1977 were not operating (Kirschbaum, 1977).

Most official reports do not consider the cooperative movement in Zaire as having achieved its social and economic objectives. Except for some savings and credit cooperatives and a few marketing cooperatives, most cooperatives have collapsed or remained in a latent state of business for a long time. Indeed, there are many factitious associations, with only a cooperative label.

According to a survey of the Ministry of Agriculture (DADR, 1980), major problems which prevent Zairian cooperatives from maturing can be summarized as follows: lack of honest and qualified managers; lack of transportation and financial means; lack of documentation and information about the principles and theory of cooperatives; and inappropriate fiscal policy which ignores the specific character of cooperative organizations.

These problems are real and cannot be minimized in the poor performance of Zairian cooperatives. Without the adequate education of members and managers, we cannot expect a successful cooperative movement. The degradation of the transportation infrastructure has a profound negative impact on cooperatives operating in rural areas and on the global economy.

My own experience in this field allows me to state some general observations about the current situation of cooperatives in Zaire. At first, a close analysis of Zairian cooperatives shows that early success was due to the dynamism of some leaders such as Catholic and Protestant missionaries, as were the cases for savings and credit cooperatives. But once these leaders withdrew, many cooperatives collapsed. Individual dynamism is not sufficient to sustain growth. An adequate economic policy is needed to help the cooperatives grow. Also each type of cooperative faces specific problems. For instance, marketing cooperatives are the most affected by the poor road infrastructure. In many areas, produce rot in the fields because there are not enough buyers. Peasants have no incentive to increase production because of past experience and frustration. Without adequate transportation, the marketing cooperatives finally collapse.

The main obstacle to savings and credit cooperatives may be their incapacity to provide substantial loans, especially productive loans. Indeed, 60% of savings are invested in commercial banks and only 20% conceded as credit. The impact of these cooperatives on the national economy is minimal because their loans are mainly conceded for consumption and social expenditures rather than agricultural investments.

Cooperatives of agricultural production are the most difficult to introduce in the peasant community. Indeed, the village consumption pattern is carried out on a

community basis, while production remains an individual matter. It is, then, difficult to introduce production cooperatives.

Past experience plays an important part in the failure of cooperatives. Peasants who were once involved in a cooperative tend to be suspicious about new cooperatives. Also the conflict between peasants interests and governmental objectives leads to failure when cooperatives are initiated by the state and their managers imposed by bureaucrats.

Understanding the role of cooperatives for peasant agriculture requires an investigation into the realities of the rural economy, such as the farming systems, the main agricultural products, the marketing system and its problems, and the attitudes and expectations of the peasant community towards other social groups. The following section is a case study of a the Yira rural area.

CASE STUDY: AGRICULTURE IN THE YIRA

The Yira people, also known as the Nande, constitute an homogeneous ethnic group living in the Eastern region; mainly in the administrative zones of Lubero and Beni (North Kivu Region). The Yira region is a rural area dominated by agriculture, which employs about 90% of the work force. The major rural centres of this region are Butembo, Beni, Kayina and Kanyabayonga. The ecological zones of this region of 25,580 km² are dominated by highlands with an altitude of more than 2,100 m, medium altitude areas of 1,600–2,000 m and lowlands with an altitude of less than 1,000 m altitude.

Butembo is the capital city of the Yira region. It has 100,000 inhabitants and is an important commercial centre. In Zaire, Yira people are reputed to be successful traders. Despite the relative lack of interest about this area by the central government, both during the colonial era and after independence, Butembo is today a prosperous commercial centre. It has five commercial banks, an airport, a few small industrial enterprises based on the processing of agricultural products (coffee, tea, quinquina, wheat), and several trading firms. These firms supply Kisangani, Goma and Kinshasa with foodstuffs and supply the Yira region with manufactured goods, mostly imported from Mombasa in Kenya.

The Yira region is one of the most productive agricultural regions in Zaire according to the volume and variety of its agricultural output. Cassava, maize, sorgho, coffee, plantains and beans are produced in low and medium altitude areas. The highland area, where about 20% of the Yira population lives, is a market gardening area. With an average temperature of 15 C and an annual rainfall of 1,200 mm, it is a propitious area for producing the cereals and vegetables of the temperate zones: wheat, potatoes, barley, garlic, beetroot and radishes. These exotic vegetables were introduced during the colonial era to supply the European settlers.

In the Yira market gardening area, the land is intensively cultivated. Thus, contrary to other agricultural regions in Zaire, this area does not practice shifting cultivation or use the fallow system. Soil fertility is restored with green manure (made from the Kikuyu grass) and animal manure. The farming system is also

dominated by the mixed cropping pattern: maize and beans; potatoes and beans; cabbage and maize. However, some crops, either barley or sweet potatoes, are cultivated.

Agricultural tools are simple manual ones such as hoe, machete and spade. Pesticides and chemical fertilizers are available only for wheat and quinquina and are supplied by two agro-business firms: Midema (wheat) and Pharmakina (quinquina).

The labour force in this area is provided by family members. As in other Zairian communities, women's labour is the most important factor in food production. Women also generally take the commercialized surplus from the farms to the market as far as Butembo, 60 km away.

Agriculture faces multiple problems: (1) scarcity of land due to demographic pressure (250 inhabitants per km² and an average family farm size of about 0.5–0.8 acres), (2) degradation of road infrastructure, (3) unbalanced market prices and (4) decline of soil fertility.

The proportion of landless peasants reached 40% of the total peasant population in 1989, while more than 50% of the peasant community was entitled to use the land only on an usufruct basis. Thus, the traditional chief called "Mwami," his notables, "Bakama," are the actual land owners to whom peasants pay an annual tribute (in cash or in kind). This traditional system concentrates the land among a minority of landlords, who comprise less than 10% of the Yira rural population. This system still persists in the Yira region despite the Zairian Land Reform Law (Loi Bakajika) which stipulated that land is the exclusive and inalienable property of the State. The resettlement initiated by private institutions such as Catholic missionaries and Canadian cooperation along with the local administration, aimed to move peasants from the overpopulated highland zones to the lowland region by opening new villages, but has not yet produced tangible results.

The degradation of the transportation infrastructure is also another handicap to the agricultural development of Yira society. Roads between Goma-Butembo (300 km) and Butembo-Kisangani (800 km) connects the Yira region to other regions. Traffic on these roads is dangerous and is often disrupted by rain in this equatorial zone. Rural roads connecting the market gardening area to Butembo are quasi-abandoned.

Consequently, the few traders who risk their trucks on these impossible roads offer very low prices to peasants. Since vegetables are perishable and adequate storage facilities do not exist, peasants have no choice but to sell their products at these low prices. For instance, in October 1989, 10 kg of potatoes cost 100 Zaires in the market gardening area, 400 Zaires in Butembo, 1,500 Zaires in Goma and 4,000 Zaires in Kinshasa. Thus the consumer price in Kinshasa was about 40 times the producer price in Masereka.

There is an imbalance in prices between manufactured goods supplied by agro-business firms and peasant produce. Consequently, the latter are unable to afford manufactured goods. Kasay (1983) found that in the Yira highland area, peasants sell about 21% of the total production and 34% rot in the field.

The decline in land fertility is caused by intensive soil cultivation, insufficient fertilizer and the lack of appropriate farming methods. For example, during the

1940s, small-scale farmers yielded an average of 1,600 kg/ha. of wheat, but only 600 kg/ha. during the 1969–1979 period. Since 1982, Midema has been supplying fertilizers to peasants and production per hectare could be raised to 929 kg (Zone de Lubero, 1988). This means that land productivity can be improved in this area by applying appropriate methods and fertilizers.

Improvement has been demonstrated in the recent development projects in the region. These include the participation of local community and foreign institutions in the form of agricultural cooperatives, anti-erosion measures and production/supply of improved seeds.

Indeed, in Yira, there are 56 active agricultural cooperatives, the highest number of any region in Zaire. There are also other cooperative societies such as handicraft, medical, savings and credit, and school cooperatives. Below, I present results of my field survey in the Yira region concerning propositions to attain integral development through agriculture from the standpoint of farmers.

I. Farmers' Propositions to Improve Agriculture in the Yira Society

In October 1989, I interviewed farmers in the Yira rural area. I also conducted a questionnaire among 68 members in 4 villages (Kitsuka: 15; Bandakwa: 11; Masereka: 17; Luoto: 11) and in Butembo (14 respondents) at the head office of the cooperative. The questionnaire was multiple choice and each interviewed person could point out many factors to explain his opinion. Thus the relative importance of each factor is calculated according to the percentage of respondents in the sample. Interviewed persons were all married men with an average of 6 people per household. 28 members were more than 60 years old, 20 were between 50 and 60; 11 were between 40 and 50, and 9 under 40. 36 members had attended elementary school; 15 had attended secondary schools and 17 had not received any formal education. Four main questions were asked to each cooperative's members:

1. Why did you join the cooperative?
2. Are you satisfied with the cooperative's services?
3. What are the reasons for your dissatisfaction?
4. What should be done to improve the cooperative's role in the rural development of your area?

At first, members were asked why they joined the cooperative. Table 3 gives their reasons for joining the cooperative. The majority of respondents indicated that

Table 3. Reasons for joining the cooperative (Coovepala).

	Frequency	%
To find a regular market for the farm produce	62	91.17
To sell and buy at good prices	40	58.82
To improve the standard of living	36	52.94
To overcome trader exploitation	24	35.29
To make savings	18	26.47
To access agricultural inputs and consumer goods	8	11.76
To learn from past successful cooperative experience	6	8.82
To receive technical and financial aid	4	5.88

Table 4. Member perception of the coovepala services.

	Frequency	%
Satisfaction	0	0
Dissatisfaction	68	100

Table 5. Reasons of member dissatisfaction with the coovepala performance.

	Frequency	%
The cooperative does not regularly buy the member produce	40	58.82
The cooperative does not pay the members though it recorded a net profit	28	41.17
Embezzlement of the assets by the leaders	18	26.47
The leaders do not involve members in the decision-making process	15	22.05
Unavailability of agricultural inputs and consumer goods	9	13.23
Favoritism in buying the produce	5	7.35
Lack of technical and financial support	5	7.35

Table 6. Propositions to improve the role of coovepala in the Yira rural area.

	Frequency	%
Creation of strong and efficient agricultural cooperatives	50	73.53
Competitive prices for produce	46	67.64
Technical and financial assistance	38	55.88
Democratic control of the cooperative by members	30	44.11
Democratic elections of the leaders	10	14.70
Honesty of leaders	8	11.76
Education of members and leaders	5	7.35
Supply of agricultural inputs	2	2.94
Exclusive purchase of member produce	1	1.47

their reason was to find a regular market for their perishable produce and to improve their position in the rural-urban system of trade.

Second, when asked if, after joining the cooperative, they were satisfied with cooperative's performance, all respondents (100%) answered negatively (Table 4). During the group interview, peasants were unanimous in their opinion that Coovepala failed in its mission and is now useless in their area. Third, peasants who were not satisfied with the cooperative services were asked to give their reasons, as summarized in Table 5. The survey shows that the main reason for peasant dissatisfaction is the failure of the cooperative to buy their products regularly. They also insisted, during group interview, that the chairman of the board of directors had confiscated all the cooperative had become personal business. The cooperative is now had become personal business. He engaged the cooperative in many transactions without consulting the general assembly. The cooperative's leadership was interested in short-term and profit-oriented business, such as sales of palm oil to members and non-members at market prices.

Lastly, farmers were asked what should be done in order to improve the cooperative's role in the rural development of their region. The findings are summarized in Table 6. For peasants, the most efficient way to attain agricultural development is

the creation of strong farming associations. These include agricultural cooperatives that can introduce technological innovations, gather rural savings, concede productive loans, provide permanent and non-formal education and, most important, overcome exploitation from traders in the market. However, cooperatives should benefit from supportive policies by the government and operation by capable, honest leaders. During the group interview, peasants stated that, despite poor performance of existing agricultural cooperatives, they do not intend to give up either the cooperative membership, or their commercial agriculture. They were confident in the future and insisted that they have already financially invested in this enterprise.

This optimistic attitude in the future of the cooperative and commercial agriculture is encouraging as regards the contribution of the agricultural cooperatives to the development process in Zaire.

The fact that Yira peasants chose to struggle against the adverse conditions, and their local initiatives have attracted the interest of foreign donors such as Oxfarm, Belgian Cooperation, Canadian Cooperation, and the European Community. However, it is unfortunate that so far the government of Zaire seems not to support the cooperative development.

II. Cooperatives as a Central Component of Agricultural Development

The cooperative's role in the Yira rural society is important. Both members and leaders recognized that the cooperative was imperative to develop the region. Indeed, agriculture is the only means of capital accumulation in this area. Prosperous traders have retained their land and still continue to produce crops. Commerce between the Yira region and other Zairian cities is based on agricultural goods. Cash crops such as coffee, quinquina and tea, and illegal exports, mostly, of ivory and gold allow the Yira traders to gain foreign currency from Uganda, Sudan and Kenya and supply the Yira region with manufactured imports.

However, agriculture enriches only Yira traders, not the peasant community. Visiting the Yira rural area, one is astonished by the contrast between the abundance of farm produce in the fields and the impoverishment of the villagers who are ill-educated, ill-clothed, and live in squalid slums.

Some authors (Young, 1987) consider that in many underdeveloped countries, agricultural cooperatives have fallen into a state of insolvency due largely to farmer indifference toward participation in cooperative business. Coovepala's experience contradicts this allegation. On the contrary, the members are conscious of their weakness when dealing individually with traders. So they are confident in the cooperative's potential to upgrade their social and economic position. They support the cooperative when it includes them in the decision-making process, and ignore the cooperative when they are not consulted on important matters concerning the future of their institution.

The current stagnation of cooperatives in Yira society shows that without an adequate contribution of public and private institutions devoted to rural development, agricultural cooperatives cannot grow and mature in Zaire. To achieve self-reliance of the peasant community requires, first of all, the active support of the

small-scale producer organizations. Since the initial capital collected from the members is small due to their low per capita income, government intervention has been the major factor of success in countries where cooperatives are now successful. For instance, Young (1987: 25) wrote about the development of agricultural cooperatives in South Korea, that "owing to such strong support by the government over a long period of time, agricultural cooperatives could expand the volume of their business both from governmental consignment and from participation of member-patrons within rather a short period of time." This is also true for advanced countries such as Japan where agricultural cooperatives have benefited from governmental financial and technical assistance in their incipient stage.

In Zaire, this support should consist of a appropriate legislation that would replace the inadequate and outdated ordinance of 1956. Financial support should be provided by the Zairian agricultural credit bank and by savings and credit cooperatives. However, agricultural credit banks deal exclusively with large-scale farms which have collateral. Savings and credit cooperatives currently do not concede credit to peasants or to their cooperatives.

Given the above situation, one cannot help but conclude that cooperatives hardly achieve their objectives. What is more, agricultural cooperatives are mismanaged. One of the reasons for this could be attributed to the staff's lack of education and management skills.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To solve the agrarian crisis in Zaire and to attain agricultural development, policy makers must place at the center the peasants' interests, values, opinions and resources. In other words, adopt the framework of Agrarian Populism Approach which considers that problems of rural areas are better known by peasants than by professional researchers and bureaucrats. But there is a need to sustain a teamwork between peasants and academic professionals in order to rationally define peasant problems of illiteracy, low land productivity, and medical care, and to help them set up attainable goals and the timing for these goals. The means to achieve these objectives may consist of continuous education and training for peasants, the introduction of appropriate technology in rural areas, and agricultural credit for small-scale farmers.

Such means are difficult for the individual peasants to muster so the only solution for a self reliant development may consist of agricultural cooperatives. Cooperatives should benefit, in their incipient stage, from the assistance from government, non-governmental organizations, and public and private businesses. These groups may also intervene by providing education and training, social and economic infrastructures in rural areas. Continuous education can particularly improve the literacy level of the general public and make it responsive to the cooperative movement. The cooperatives' achievements must be evaluated from the objectives set by the peasants in order for the cooperatives to contribute to the process of agricultural development. Such feed-back will help correct the prevailing policy and set up new direction and new targets.

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