



Tropentag, October 11-13, 2006, Bonn

“Prosperity and Poverty in a Globalised World—
Challenges for Agricultural Research”

Cotton Production Technologies and Women’s Time Use: Giving More Attention to Children Education, Health and Nutrition

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Abstract

Cotton is for most francophone West African countries the main export crop is subject of many challenges not only in terms of international trade, but also in terms household management in rural communities. Cotton producers in West African setting are small-scale farmers working mainly with family labour. Production activities require both male and female labour. Actually, two main production technologies (organic and conventional) are used with different labour demand features, particularly female labour. The development of organic cotton gives women the opportunity to hold their separate cotton farm and draw cash income from it. This study investigates how cotton production technologies adopted by the household (organic or conventional) influence the time use systems of women and the impact on children education, health and nutrition that are also household responsibilities demanding particular time investment from women. The goal of the paper is to make aware, projects, NGOs and institutions working on education, health and nutrition issues in rural area, that, their strategies should be adapted to specific time use systems of women. Therefore, it aims also to provide them with accurate data to ease strategic decision-making. Data for this paper have been collected from both conventional and organic cotton producers’ household having children less than 10 years old in central Benin. Preliminary tentative results confirm the difference of time use systems of women in household adopting organic and conventional cotton. Particularly, women holding their own cotton farm share their working time between the husband’s farm and their own farm. By getting their own income, they contribute financially more to the education and health of their children. However, they lack time in choosing appropriate food combination for their children. As the health situation of an individual depends first of all on his nutritional state, nutritional trainings should be targeted to those women who are getting increasing interest in holding separate cotton farm.

Keywords: Conventional cotton, education, gender, health, nutrition, organic cotton, time planning