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Impact of Organic Farming on Rural Households' Welfare: Evidence from Benin (West Africa)

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Abstract

Although introduced in West Africa for almost two decades, no comprehensive assessment of the impact of organic cotton on rural household wellbeing has been carried out. This research aims to contribute to fill this gap by addressing particularly the question whether and how the adoption of organic cotton farming affects farmer households' welfare. For this purpose, we used both qualitative and quantitative methods and collected data on a sample of 191 households in three agro-ecological zones of Republic of Benin. We used new development of impact assessment approach, by combining the nonparametric propensity score matching and qualitative methods. Our qualitative account based on participatory wealth ranking, helped get insights into how farmers perceive and construct their living standard and what they value as criteria according to their specific social, economic, and cultural contexts. A set of criteria ranging from social, economic and cultural aspects has been considered with relatively different weights in each farmer community. It came out that around 40% of organic farmers seem confident to have reduced poverty over the last 3 years. Moreover, we found that the adoption of organic cotton has a positive impact on rather poorer farmer households' wellbeing including gender empowerment, poverty reduction and vulnerability. However, most of the organic households encounter problems in food security during the year. The conventional farming with its higher risk taking requirement is more attractive for the middle class of rural society and the higher labour requirement of organic farming might reduce their willingness to convert. The middle social strata of rural society could as well benefit from the organic principles, if the challenges of mechanisation, research-advice performance, credit and infrastructure are addressed.

Keywords: Benin, gender empowerment, organic cotton, poverty, propensity score matching, vulnerability, West Africa