

Organic cotton - does it offer multiple benefits for farmers? A sustainable livelihood analysis in central India

Background

- Cotton as a cash crop is a key income source for smallholder farmers in India
- Compared to conventional cotton, organic cotton production could offer benefits beyond income generation
- 47% of global organic cotton production stems from India
 - Produced on > 220 000 ha
 - Produced by > 140 000 farmers, mostly small-holders (< 2ha) ¹

Aim

Assessing the benefits of organic cotton production for the farmers beyond income by taking the complexity of farmers' livelihoods into account.

Methods

The sustainable livelihood framework was used to capture the individual livelihood choices of farmers, taking economic, social, physical, natural and human capital into account. To draw meaningful conclusions, we compare organic farmers to their conventional peers in the cotton-growing region of the Nimar valley in Madhya Pradesh, India. We conducted the livelihood survey with 90 farmers in the region (45 organic, 45 conventional).

Results

- Organic and conventional farmers differed in their motivation for choosing their respective farming practice (Figure 1)
- Organic and conventional farmers differed in the amount they spent for input costs; with organic farmers spending less on purchasing inputs than conventional farmers (Figure 2)
- Organic farmers were found to have stronger social networks, perceived higher increases in soil fertility and a higher share of food self sufficiency (Figure 3)
- Organic farmers had higher shares of on-farm diversification (e.g. intercropping, number and types of animals)

Conclusion

- Organic and conventional farmers differ in their livelihood choices
- Differences in social and human capital might be attributed to project activities in the region (socio-economic support for organic cotton farmers)
- Effective design of interventions aiming to improve farmers livelihoods need to take their complex realities into account
- More research is needed to develop an adapted framework to guide the design of such interventions

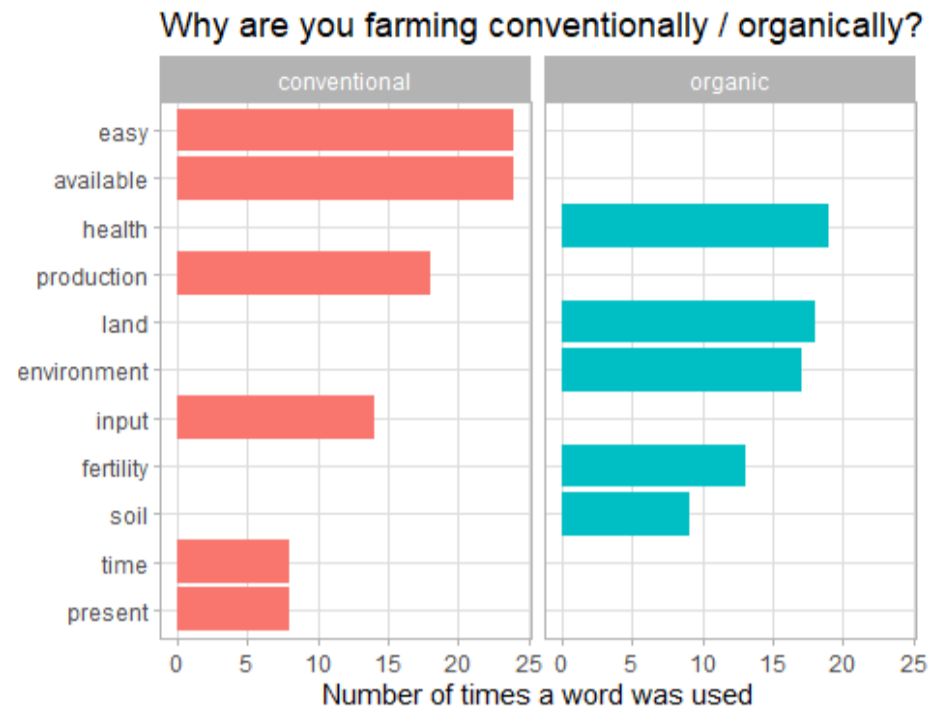


Figure 1: Word usage in explaining their motivation for organic and conventional farmers

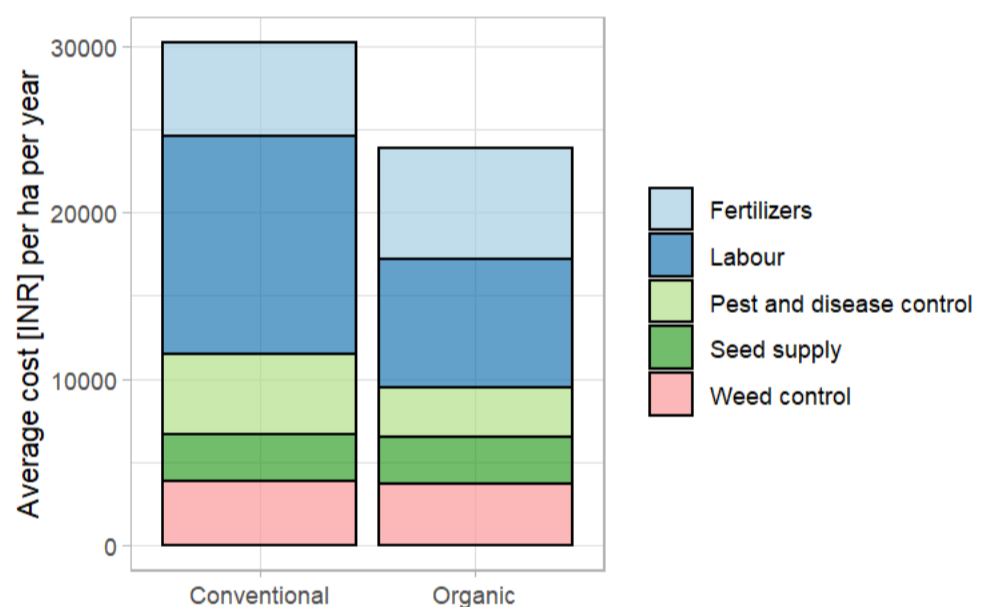


Figure 2: Comparison of average Input cost per ha per year in INR for organic and conventional farmers

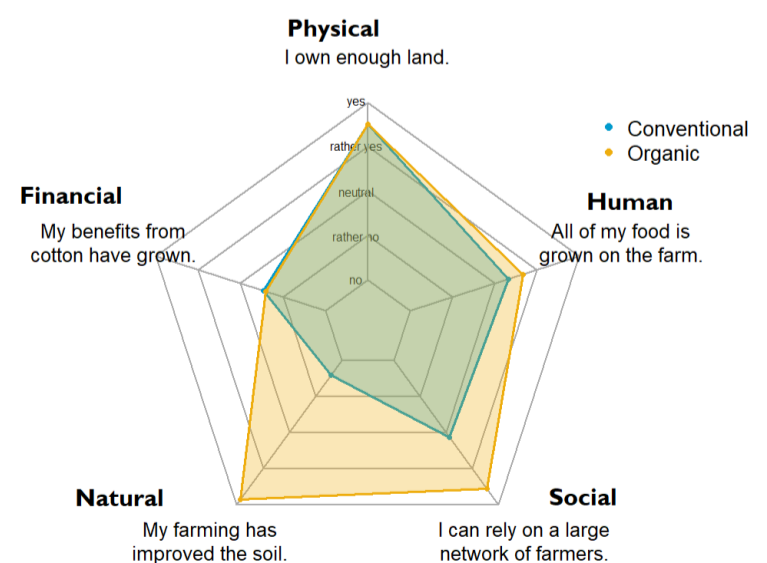


Figure 3: Spider diagram of the selected livelihood capitals assessed, comparing between organic and conventional farmers

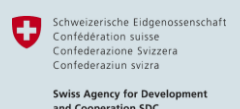
Literature

¹ Willer, Helga et al. (Eds.) (2020): The World of Organic Agriculture. Statistics and Emerging Trends 2020. Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), Frick, and IFOAM – Organics International, Bonn.

Habermann (2020): Impacts of organic cotton production on the livelihoods of farmers: a case study from central India. Masters' thesis. University of Innsbruck and Free University of Bozen-Bolzano

Acknowledgments:

SysCom is funded by



This project is supported by the Coop Sustainability Fund.



LED LIECHTENSTEIN DEVELOPMENT SERVICE

