

*April 2019, Marion Cuisin*



## *From the Bottom to the Top*

*A story of youth participation in businesses of the agri-food sector  
in the south of Benin*

Wageningen University – Social Sciences

**MSc Thesis, Chair Group Knowledge Technology and Innovation (KTI)**

# **From the Bottom to the Top**

A story of youth participation in businesses of the agri-food sector in  
the south of Benin

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# *Abstract*

This thesis is a case study about the participation of youth in agrobusinesses in Benin. The research aims at describing through the stories of local people, the situation of youth and their relation with their work in the agri-food sector. Data collection was conducted in two food processing businesses located in the municipalities of Allada and Bohicon in the south of Benin by performing participant observation methods.

Findings reveal that youth inclusion in agrobusinesses is very low. In the two businesses subjects of this study, youth is involved in temporary activities, characterised by a lot of instability and a place at the bottom of the pyramid. Youth's perspectives are not included in the businesses and it limits their ability to empower themselves as well as their motivation in general.

Due to the negative image of work in the agri-food sector, interest is very low and innovation is not sufficient. Agrobusinesses face certain challenges that would require a larger participation of the population. These challenges of agrobusinesses could be opportunities to increase the employment of youth but it requires raising awareness on the potential of the agri-food sector, and empowering and training young people in order to match the purpose of agrobusinesses with skilful and motivated youth.

Outcomes of this research can be translated into recommendations for development interventions or the design of new policies that aim at improving productivity of the agri-food sector and employment of youth. Further research is suggested in the domain of communication to determine the preferred communication types of youth. As this vulnerable group includes a large diversity further research could be done with a specific focus on women.

## Résumé

Ce mémoire présente une étude de cas sur la participation des jeunes dans deux entreprises agro-alimentaires au Bénin. La recherche est basée sur des histoires racontées par des acteurs locaux à propos de la situation des jeunes et de leur travail dans le secteur agricole et agroalimentaire. Les données ont été collectées avec des méthodes d'observation participante, dans deux entreprises basées Allada et Bohicon, au sud du Bénin.

Les résultats révèlent que la participation des jeunes dans les entreprises du secteur agricole et agroalimentaire est faible. Dans chacune des organisations étudiées, les jeunes sont principalement employés en tant que travailleurs occasionnels et se retrouvent donc dans des situations instables, au bas de la pyramide sociale. Les points de vue et opinions de la jeunesse ne sont pas pris en compte par les entreprises, limitant ainsi leur capacité à gagner en autonomie et leur motivation.

A cause de la mauvaise image des travaux dans le secteur agricole et agroalimentaire, l'intérêt porté à celui-ci et le taux d'innovation sont très faibles. Les entreprises agroalimentaires font face à des défis qui nécessiteraient une plus grande participation de la population pour être résolus. Ces défis pourraient représenter des opportunités pour l'emploi des jeunes à condition d'éveiller leur intérêt pour le secteur et de les former aux besoins des entreprises.

Les conclusions de cette recherche peuvent être traduites en recommandations pour des projets de développement ou pour l'élaboration de nouvelles politiques régionales ayant pour but d'améliorer l'emploi des jeunes et la productivité du secteur agricole et agroalimentaire. Des recherches plus poussées sont recommandées dans le domaine de la communication dans le but de déterminer les moyens préférés par les jeunes pour communiquer. Étant donné que la jeunesse inclut une grande diversité d'acteurs, des recherches supplémentaires avec un focus particulier sur la place des femmes pourraient compléter ces résultats.

# Foreword

"From the Bottom to the Top" is what I hope for African youth to achieve.

I had the opportunity to grow up in France, a developed country where almost every child has the opportunity to go to school. From my childhood up until now that I am a university student many people kept asking me "What do you want to do after?". I think my answer changed from firefighter, to professional horse rider, to now being a Master student in Development and Rural Innovation. Even though this type of question upset me sometimes (especially while being a teenager because I had a very unclear vision of what my future would look like), I feel now grateful that my relatives forced me into this reflection about my future. I am also grateful to my family and especially my parents for availing me the opportunity to choose my own path and for supporting along all those years... I am almost there, mum and dad!

During my fieldwork, I experienced worldwide inequalities. Knowing that you are lucky is one thing, experiencing it is another. The Beninese young persons that I met during my fieldwork did not have the same opportunities in terms of education and career development as I did. I felt guilty about it. Besides, for some people, consequences of the colonialism are still fresh and as a French citizen, I have been reminded about it a couple of times. It makes the inequalities even more unfair. I also felt helpless about it. Is it possible to right the wrong of the past? How can I help these young people? It was not the first time I had these feelings but they became more meaningful as I am about to start a career in the development field. In many ways these feelings guided my fieldwork. I intended to understand youth, the reasons why they find themselves in their current situation and what could support them in making a more comfortable living.

This fieldwork experience probably changed me in more ways than I can tell. It was not my first experience abroad but it was a meaningful one. I studied a subject that mattered to me: youth and agriculture. The place of youth has always been a sensitive topic for me, even in Europe. As a young person I experienced social depreciation a few times. I did not enjoy having to fight my way to the top of the pyramid to get an opinion exposed. Is it because I am young that my requests are less important or valuable? Thus, as a young person I can relate to this subject and I am convinced that youth has much value to add in any type of activity.

Besides a meaningful one, this thesis was a fun experience as well. I met incredible people who touched me, who inspired me, who supported me or helped me when I needed it. For this reason, I do not think this document is the outcome of only my own experience, but it is the report of a shared experience with tens of people in Africa and also in Europe. Conversations with Daphne, Joey, Esteban and Marieke certainly shaped the way my thesis is constructed today. Daily life in Nina's family definitely fashioned my vision of Benin. Contacts made thanks to Eline allowed me to adapt to the local culture. Activities with Noémie and Antoine made me want to persevere in this work. Discussions with Yves, Adodo, Eusèbe and Madeleine changed my way of seeing Africa. I am grateful to each and every one that I met and who supported in anyways in this work. Of course, this also includes my supervisor David, who guided me along the way and gave me advices and recommendations to produce something scientifically relevant.

It was a long a way to go ... from the bottom to the top! My hope is that all young African will have equal chances of going, if they want, from the bottom of the pyramid, to the top and have a career full of success and accomplishments. I hope this work will contribute somehow to their empowerment but anyways I will keep on making efforts to contribute to more equality and empowerment of youth.

# Table of content

<i>Abstract.....</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Résumé.....</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Foreword.....</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of figures.....</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of tables.....</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of information boxes.....</i>	<i>vii</i>
<b>1. Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. A complex and multi-scale problem.....	1
1.2. Trends of agri-food sector opportunities.....	1
1.3. Youth, development and empowerment.....	2
1.4. Research objective and Research questions.....	3
1.5. Structure of this report.....	4
<b>2. Chapter 2: Conceptual &amp; theoretical framework.....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. The frames and framing.....	5
2.2. Youth as a concept.....	5
2.3. Youth & Work.....	6
2.4. Youth participation.....	7
2.5. Businesses as producers of innovations.....	8
2.6. Agri-food Value Chains.....	9
2.7. Interrelations of the frames and concepts.....	10
<b>3. Chapter 3: A research approach.....</b>	<b>12</b>
3.1. Research set-up.....	12
3.2. Methodology for data collection.....	13
3.3. Limitations for data collection.....	14
3.4. Processing and analysis of the interviews and observations.....	15
3.5. Reflections on the research process and my own role.....	15
<b>4. Chapter 4: Objects of study.....</b>	<b>17</b>
4.1. A small and traditional cooperative.....	17
4.2. A modern and industrial enterprise.....	21
4.3. Youth, a marginalised group in crisis.....	27
<b>5. Chapter 5: Framing the situation of agrobusinesses.....</b>	<b>32</b>
5.1. Challenges of agrobusinesses.....	32
5.2. Inclusion and participation.....	35
5.3. Potential opportunities.....	38
<b>6. Chapter 6: Youth ambitions for a better future.....</b>	<b>41</b>
6.1. Youth perceptions of the agri-food sector.....	41
6.2. Youth mindsets at work.....	43



6.3.	Connecting youth and opportunities .....	45
7.	<i>Chapter 7: Coping strategies and societal change .....</i>	<i>48</i>
7.1.	Youth interactions with agrobusinesses .....	49
7.2.	Facilitating youth empowerment to match with the employment opportunities .....	52
7.3.	Facilitating interactions .....	55
8.	<i>Chapter 8: Conclusions.....</i>	<i>59</i>
8.1.	Communication.....	59
8.2.	Capacity building, creating space for youth participation .....	60
9.	<i>Chapter 9: Reflection and discussion on the research .....</i>	<i>62</i>
9.1.	Reflection on the research process.....	62
9.2.	Limitations of the research and the approach.....	63
9.3.	Recommendations for further research.....	64
9.4.	Societal implications .....	65
	<i>List of references.....</i>	<i>66</i>
	<i>Appendix A: Framework of youth participation – 7P model.....</i>	<i>69</i>
	<i>Appendix B: List of interviews .....</i>	<i>71</i>
	SG Business.....	71
	Maize transformation company .....	71
	<i>Appendix C: Story and pictures of Soy Goussi .....</i>	<i>73</i>
	<i>Appendix D: Pictures of the maize company.....</i>	<i>74</i>
	<i>Appendix E: Evaluation of youth participation in professional activities.....</i>	<i>75</i>

## *List of figures*

Figure 1: The P7 Model: A thinking tool for visioning, planning, enacting and evaluating youth participation (Cahill & dadvand, 2018) .....	8
Figure 2: Localisation of the two businesses explored during this research .....	13
Figure 3 : Transformation activities and products at the cooperative .....	17
Figure 4: Organisational chart SG cooperative.....	18
Figure 5: Organisation chart maize transformation company .....	23
Figure 6: Negative circle of youth relationship with work.....	45
Figure 7: Model describing potential interactions between youth and the agrobusinesses.....	48
Figure 8: Core of the model, interactions between youth and the businesses .....	49
Figure 9: Processes facilitating youth empowerment .....	52
Figure 10: Process facilitating the interactions between businesses and youth .....	55
Figure 11: Environment influencing the interaction between businesses and youth.....	57
Figure 12: Soy Goussi that comes out of the press (left), Soy Goussi after roasting (right) .....	73
Figure 13: Different types of packaging (the cheapest on the left and the most expensive on the right).....	73
Figure 14: Facilities of the maize transformation company .....	74
Figure 15: Piles of flour bags rotting in the storage unit.....	74
Figure 16: Scale to weight the trucks with maize seeds .....	74

## *List of tables*

Table 1: Gist of the 7P model developed by Cahill and Dadvand (2018) in the youth participation framework .....	69
Table 2: List of informants interviewed in the SG business .....	71
Table 3: List of the informants interviewed in the maize transformation company .....	71

## *List of information boxes*

Box 1. Examples of questions asked during the interviews: .....	14
Box 2. Main product of the maize transformation company .....	21
Box 3. Co-Product of the maize transformation company .....	22
Box 4. Proposition of criteria to differentiate youth from adults.....	28
Box 5. Example of issues affecting the rentability of agrobusinesses: .....	33
Box 6. Evaluation of youth participation in the SG cooperative and the maize company with the framework proposed by Cahill & Dadvand (2018).....	37
Box 7. Objective of finding new ways of communication .....	56



# 1. Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1. A complex and multi-scale problem

Benin is a French speaking country located in West Africa with an estimated population of 11.5 million (INSAE, 2018). The country has a stable and democratic government but its inhabitants are amongst the poorest in the world. The UNDP ranked it 163rd country over 189 according to its Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2018).

Agriculture represents 25% of the Growth Domestic Product (GDP) but 45 to 55% of the total employment (Banque Mondiale, 2018). Productivity of this sector should be increased to sustain the economy. The country is relying on exports and imports which represent 79.4% of the GDP but 80% of these exchanges are done with his neighbouring country: Nigeria. Hence Benin is highly dependent on the political and economic situation across the border (Banque Mondiale, 2018).

Benin's economy is mainly informal which presents opportunities for inclusive development but creates problems of employment vulnerability. It can be perceived as an advantage because it leaves more freedom to development interventions and businesses to set up new types of activities more inclusive of vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, it poses threats to employment stability and leaves the workers unprotected (Njifen, 2014).

Baye (2018) argues that Benin's poverty is correlated with structural issues such as the lack of diversification of the economy and the prominence of the informal sector in a context where public administration and implementation of public policies sorely lack efficiency. He presents inclusive growth as the main challenge Benin needs to achieve in order to fight poverty. Currently, Benin is marked by high rates of unemployment. Particularly Youth is affected by the situation of the labour market, 20% of the population between 15 and 24 years old is currently not in school, university nor employed (ILO, 2012).

Youth's employment situation seems to be the consequence of complex interactions of factors such as governmental policies currently in place (Gbetoenonmon, 2013) in the country but also culture, traditions, access to education, itself strongly related to the location and state of isolation of the considered area (Barlet, d'Aiglepierre, Méric, & Ollivier, 2016). Although economic opportunities might exist, youth is not necessarily ready to seize them because of unawareness, inappropriate skills, or lack of motivation (O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002).

As youth is looking for employment, the agri-food sector seems to be the appropriate domain to provide job opportunities (Haggblade et al., 2015). The agricultural sector is often disregarded by young people who is not aware of the opportunities and the dynamism of agrobusinesses. (Barlet et al., 2016). Agriculture and agribusinesses already present the largest amount of job opportunities on the African continent, but this amount should still increase because of growing and rapidly changing food systems (Haggblade et al., 2015; Minde et al., 2015).

## 1.2. Trends of agri-food sector opportunities

Agriculture is a sector with high potential for youth employment. Authors argue that employment in Africa, in this domain, is likely to increase in the coming years. Although currently jobs are

fulfilled by uneducated and untrained persons, the situation is expected to change in the coming years because of the need to improve productivity in this sector (Fox & Thomas, 2016).

The choice to work in agriculture is not always voluntary (Kruijssen, 2009). The image of the sector and the type of work it provides is mostly perceived as very physical and repetitive and thus not attractive. People and especially youth working in this sector are often forced into these activities because of economic reasons. Professional activities in agriculture and agroindustry often present the advantage of not requiring specific skills or knowledge and thus being accessible to those who did not have the opportunity to pursue an education (Fox & Thomas, 2016).

However, because of the current economic challenges faced by African countries, agriculture needs to gain productivity, especially in Benin where the balance of exports and imports is deficient and having a very negative impact on the economy (Dramé-Yayé, Chakeredza, & Temu, 2011). The agri-food sector will require educated persons to work in the sector, produce innovation and improve the productivity. Because food is necessary to any type of human activity, agriculture is a key sector in the development of African countries. The agri-food sector fulfils a human need and supports all the other social activities of a globalised economy (IFAD, 2014).

Because the challenges of agri-food systems will require more and more skilful persons to develop productive activities, youth involvement is important. It is also important to educate and train youth to the needs of the agri-food sector (Minde et al., 2015).

Several authors like Gbetoenonmon (2013), Haggblade, Diallo, Staatz, Thériault, & Traoré, (2014) and Baba-Moussa (2017) argue that youth difficulties to access to the job market are consequences of the education system which is not adapted to the needs in terms of skills and knowledge of the private sector. Unemployment of individuals who received a higher education seems to be even higher than unemployment of non-educated people who usually accept jobs in the informal markets. These authors also mention the potential of entrepreneurial and vocational trainings to educate young people and give them access to decent jobs on the labour market. Small scale, independent and practical trainings can better target the needs of individuals and educate them for the needs of the market. They can be trained either to become entrepreneurs or to take part in existing enterprises but they are educated to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to access markets (Koyana & Mason, 2017).

Practical trainings are necessary to educate youth to the needs of agribusinesses. Especially in this sector the trainings need to be practical and with “close links with agricultural research and extension systems and with the farms, businesses and communities they serve” rather than theoretical (Minde et al., 2015). It became a priority and a great opportunity for development projects to attract the interest of young people for the jobs in the agri-food sector in order to support growth and stability of the economy (Baba-Moussa, 2017).

### *1.3. Youth, development and empowerment*

The FAO published a report in 2014 about youth in agriculture and explained in it the main issues to which people between 15 and 24 years old may be confronted. First comes the need for information, knowledge and know-how on production and processing techniques. Besides that, finances, access to land and markets are also issues related to youth implementation in agriculture (IFAD, 2014).

Development interventions are now looking for ways to include youth in agribusinesses. However, designs of such projects raises questions such as “who is youth?”. This category of population finds itself very hard to define. Some organisations such as the United Nations (UN) or the World Bank define it as people aged between 15 and 24 years old but for instance, the African Union considers it as the people between 15 and 35 years old. Definitions are changing depending on the needs of the organisations to consider some type of population and the specific context in which youth is considered. No international convention yet exists to describe youth as a specific part of a population (Barlet et al., 2016; Blum, 2007). Barlet et al., (2016) worked on a conceptual definition of youth. They refer to it as a transition period between childhood and adulthood, a phase in which the individual is seeking stability and gaining independence. The large diversity of definitions shows that the targeting of youth by development projects is a complex matter and there is still a need for further research to gather information about the characteristics and the needs of youth in specific contexts where development interventions could take place.

Not only is youth a concept which is hard to define but it is also a group which includes very different types of individuals. In Africa, while some young persons have access to education and the possibility to choose their own career path, some others are evolving in very isolated areas where access to communication and technology is very limited if not inexistent. The capacity to reach young people and empower them is very unequal. Their needs might be different but also their aspirations and ambitions. The diversity of young people makes them hard to target and make it hard to develop programmes that satisfy their needs and wishes (Kruijssen, 2009).

In terms of employment, while some might be interested by entrepreneurial activities, others might feel more insecure and thus more comfortable occupying job positions in companies that already exist. For both type of aspiration, youth should be trained to fulfil the needs of the job markets. Needs to gain skills and knowledge have already be identified as youth access to education is very unequal. However, research has not yet contextualised the current and potential interactions between youth and the job market and the potential needs to improve these interactions.

#### *1.4. Research objective and Research questions*

As highlighted in the work of Fox and Thomas (2016), youth is already active in the agri-food sector but it mostly occupies operative positions in the agroindustries or as farm workers in agriculture. It has not been identified yet how the interactions between youth and their job organisation is perceived.

The objective of this research is to conduct participant observations in two agrobusinesses in Benin, in order to analyse the situation of youth involved in these, and their interactions with other actors. The aim is to contextualise the interactions between youth and the agrobusinesses in Benin. With this research I hope to be able to depict the details and complexity of the interactions between youth and agrobusinesses. The case-study research gives the opportunity to dive into a specific context, observe in detail and question the stories of the actors involved in it to understand the richness of their situation. Thanks to this understanding, it is possible to generalise and provide some recommendations for future development interventions (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

This research focusses on one hand on youth, their characteristics, situation, aspirations. On the other hand, it frames the situation of the agrobusinesses, their activities, challenges including the interactions involved internally and externally. The goal is to describe the interactions that are

currently happening and that could potentially happen in order to solve the issues that both sides may encounter.

The research questions that are guided the data collection and the development of this report are:

**What are the current and potential interactions between youth and agrobusinesses in Benin?**

- How do youth and agrobusinesses interact?
- What motivates these interactions?
- What potential is there for youth to participate in agrobusinesses?
- What lessons can be learnt to improve the dynamics between youth and agrobusinesses in Benin?

### *1.5. Structure of this report*

The first chapter of this report is the current introduction. The background of the research and problem statement were described and followed by the presentation of the research objective and research questions.

The second chapter presents the literature and particularly the frameworks that allowed me to structure and present my findings. Frameworks are related to youth: its definition, context and the evaluation of its participation; and related to the businesses with innovation theories and the value chain approach which contextualise the position of the businesses in relation to the supply, the market and the other actors.

The third chapter describes the methodology that was used for the data collection. Some reflection on the research process are already included in this chapter.

The fourth chapter describes the object of study: each of the two businesses and the situation of youth in Benin. This chapter also introduces the definition of youth that I chose for this research. Elements presented in chapter 4 serve as a basis for the rest of the analysis in the following chapters.

The fifth chapter analyses the interactions between youth and the businesses from the situation of the businesses. It touches upon the challenges encountered by the businesses; the participation of youth and its position is evaluated and finally opportunities for better interactions are highlighted.

The sixth chapter analyses the interactions from the situation of youth. It describes a wider picture of youth inclusion and exclusion from the agrobusinesses and analyses the factors implying these reactions.

The seventh chapter presents strategies to cope with the current situation of the businesses and youth and to improve the interactions. The chapter is based on a new model which is being introduced at the beginning of the chapter and links the findings and the recommendations that I formulate in a visual manner.

The eighth chapter is the conclusion of the analysis. It summarises the findings, recommendations for development interventions and for further research.

The ninth chapter concludes this thesis with a reflection and a discussion about the research process and the societal implications of the findings.

## 2. Chapter 2: Conceptual & theoretical framework

### 2.1. The frames and framing

"Frames are cognitive shortcuts that people use to make sense of complex information." (Kaufman, Elliott, & Shmueli, 2003). Frames help us interpret our thoughts and observation and provide guidance to make the information understandable by other persons. Putnam & Holmer, (1992) call it the "construction of meaning" or "making sense of a situation".

Frames are also important to locate the research in the current scientific debates. They need to be adapted to the cutting-edge representations of phenomenon to describe with sufficient accuracy the reality and contribute to the addition of global scientific knowledge. The use of the literature supported me in the first place to define a topic and structure my research project in a way that is adapted and valuable to society.

For this research, I used different types of frames. My data collection being empirical and conducted by participant observation, these frames first helped me during my observations. They provided insights on where to focus, what to observe during my fieldwork. They allowed me to filter my perception and seek coherent information (Kaufman et al., 2003).

But these frames also helped me to pay attention to the obvious. The research being located in two businesses where interactions happen daily between actors, the use of frames reminded me to be attentive to mundane behaviours which usually conduct relevant information.

During the analysis, frames helped me structure my findings. They assisted me in the process of giving meaning to my observations and presenting them in a coherent and convincing manner in this report (Kaufman et al., 2003).

However, although the use of frames provides assistance in the process of "making sense of the situation", they can also direct the enquiry and impeach the exploration of new theories (Kaufman et al., 2003). In the next paragraph, I introduce the frames that assisted my data collection and analysis. However, in this empirical research, I tried to look beyond these frames and observe not only what was suggested by the literature but keep my mind open to new theories and facts.

### 2.2. Youth as a concept

Focussing on youth implies the choice of a definition that will determine the scope of the research. However, there is no universal definition of the concept of youth.

Barlet, d'Aiglepierre, Méric, & Ollivier, (2016) worked on a conceptual definition of youth. They refer to it as a transition period between childhood and adulthood, a phase in which the individual is seeking stability and gaining independence. This period being also associated with specific activities and tastes for example in terms of music. The end of youth and the moving into adulthood can manifest itself very differently depending on the context and the individual. They also mention the "blurry line" between childhood and youth and between youth and adulthood making these passages difficult to operationalise. Even if they offer to take events like the birth of a child, a

wedding, a stable job as a mark of a transition, many organisations still prefer to use an age criterion for practical reasons.

For example, although the United Nations acknowledge the definition of youth as a transition period, they prefer to define it as the persons between 15 and 24 years old for statistical reasons (UN, 2013). Indeed, the use of a biological criteria makes it easier to categorise persons either as child, youth or adults.

However, the age criteria selected to categorise youth differs considerably between organisations. Within the United Nations, several agencies use distinct ages. For instance, the UNESCO, the ILO just like the UN secretariat consider people between 15 and 24 years old but the UN habitat refers to people between 15 to 32. The African Union consider youth being between 15 and 35 years old (UN, 2013).

The use of biological age criteria to define youth shows limitations, not only because it may not be inclusive enough of the population it tries to represent but also because youth seems to be a concept very culturally related and context dependent (Barlet et al., 2016). Organisations based in Africa often use an age criterion that goes beyond 24 years old. Not only the African Union considers youth lasts until 35 years old, but local policies also refer to youth until 30, 35 or even sometimes 40 years old (Blum, 2007).

Barlet et al., (2016) explain that youth in Africa is extended over a longer period of time because of economic and social conditions. Generally, the literature suggests that youth reaches personal stability in terms of employment and family situation later than developed countries (Baba-Moussa, 2017).

To conclude, literature suggests that youth is the subject of controversial definitions. Although organisations often use age criteria because it allows to conduct better statistical analysis, authors seem to agree that lines between childhood, youth and adulthood are blurry and more complex to operationalise than by simply using a biological age criterion. If the age of someone gives an indication on the probability that he or she belongs to the 'youth category', this information is not sufficient to categorise this person. In general terms, Barlet et al., (2016) suggested to go further in the search of information and for instance to look at the marital, parental status and type of employment of the person. In the context of this ethnographic research, the data collection could go even further by researching the mind-sets of the informants and their perception of youth. In the same line of thoughts as Barlet et al., (2016) the objective is to characterise youth and to find out what the specific markers of this transition period are in southern Benin.

### 2.3. *Youth & Work*

Dhakal et al., (2018) address the global challenges of youth employment. Based on the fact that youth employment is a worldwide issue, their research highlights the precariousness of youth and reveals the reasons why there is a mismatch between requirements of job markets and abilities of youth. Furthermore, they mention the consequences of this situation on future adults and for the society in which they will be living.

Unemployment of youth leads to greater risks of unemployment later in life. But first, it also prevents the individual from building savings to support his or her family. Unemployment creates



barriers for youth to make a transition to adulthood. Couples get married, have children and move out of the family house later. They are subject to more financial dependency.

Dhakal et al., (2018) highlight that although young people often work, they have to accept insecure and part-time jobs leading to precariousness and insufficient earnings to lift them out of poverty.

Unfitness between the requirements of enterprises and candidates is often due to a mismatch in terms of skills or a lack of spatial flexibility. Even graduates can encounter difficulties accessing job opportunities because their qualifications do not necessarily match the expectations of enterprises. Wrong orientation, lack of information, is responsible for a lot of unemployment of young graduates.

This article offers hints to explain reasons and consequences of global youth unemployment. The large focus covers a wide range of challenges and was used as a lens for the analysis of youth's situation in the two cases. It gives guidance to highlight the specific issues and opportunities that could appear out of youth situation in Benin.

## 2.4. *Youth participation*

If businesses may represent an opportunity to solve the unemployment issues of youth in Benin, theories of youth participation just like the one described by O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, (2002) may balance this vision. By describing five "myths" of youth participation, the authors detail the difficulties of involving more youth in businesses, and particularly in their management. Their paper allows to understand the difficulties of having interactions between businesses and youth. A rigorous evaluation of the current and potential possibilities of youth participation is necessary in order to come to a conclusion on the opportunities of enhancing interactions.

Looking at the interaction between youth and agrobusinesses in Benin implies to look at the relationship that young people maintain with the businesses but also to look at the way businesses considers youth. The framework developed by Cahill & Dadvand, (2018) provides indications to analyse these interactions. As they argue in their paper, this framework does not only focus on the good aspects of participation but tries to keep a neutral posture towards the effects of youth participation on both youth themselves and the businesses.

Cahill and Dadvand (2018) mention a programme which in this research corresponds to the businesses. They define seven domains in which participation can be questioned (Figure 1).





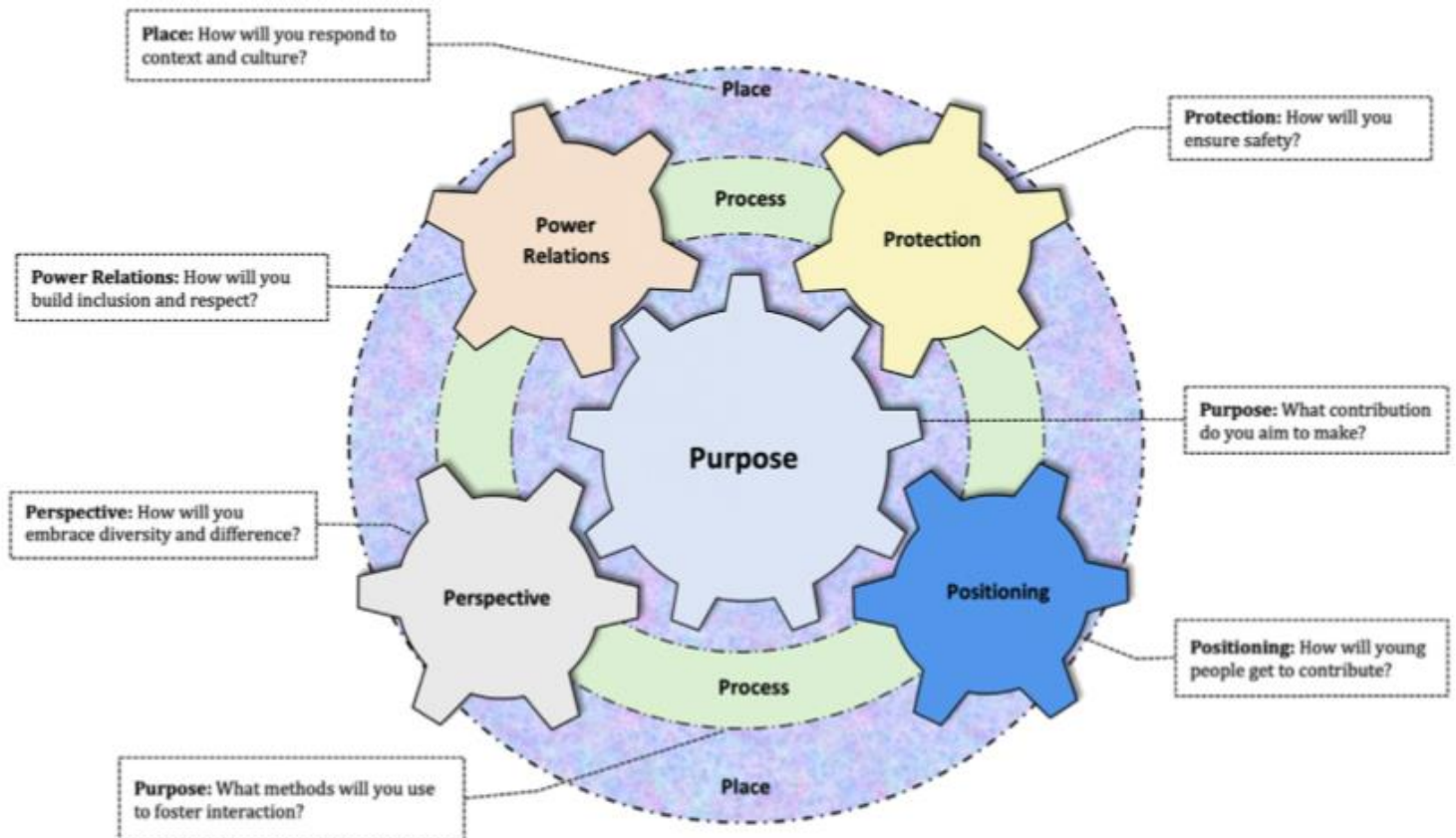


FIGURE 1: THE P7 MODEL: A THINKING TOOL FOR VISIONING, PLANNING, ENACTING AND EVALUATING YOUTH PARTICIPATION (CAHILL & DADVAND, 2018)

"Purpose" is in the middle as the core of the business structure and strategy (Figure 1). "Power relations", "protection", "positioning" and "perspective" are independent entities connected by "process" and "place".

For each of the domains, authors formulate questions to reflect upon the participation of youth (Appendix A: Framework of youth participation – 7P model). These questions guide the reflection and the analysis of the situation. They invite to consider not only the relationships between youth and other groups but also within the category of youth.

This framework provides tools to link youth with the businesses and all actors involved in it. It invites to social, cultural and organisational reflections which highlight the pitfalls and opportunities that could emerge out of the interactions between youth and businesses.

## 2.5. *Businesses as producers of innovations*

Zanella, Fu, Mohnen, & Ventresca, (2016) define innovation not only as a new material product or a technology but mention that it can also take the form of "knowledge-building activities". Processes, practices, methods or business plans can be innovative. Furthermore, innovation is not necessarily something entirely new but it can correspond to the improvement of an artefact or a practice that already exists. Taking on the definition of Zanella et al., (2016), I consider as innovation both new and improved products or practices in the context of the two agrobusinesses in Benin.

Both agrobusinesses being innovative in their own ways and in their specific context, literature on frugal and grassroots innovations suggests interesting approaches to analyse the interactions between youth and the businesses.

In the cutting edge development literature, innovation is seen not only as an end-product but also as a “mean of development” (Zanello et al., 2016).

Leliveld & Knorringa, (2018) develop this theory and explain that on a small scale, innovation can contribute to the development of the enterprise or the community that created the innovation, on a larger scale it can impact the development of the area where the innovation happens. It refers to the impact the innovation may have on the consumer of this innovation as well as the local benefits of having a successful business that can create employment in a specific area.

Although frugal and grassroots innovations seem to have an impact on development the specific consequences are still hard to identify. There is a need for further research to identify the benefits and pitfalls of innovation processes in developing countries (Leliveld & Knorringa, 2018).

Vossenbergh (2018) propose to ask questions about what “women can and cannot do” to determine the degree of inclusiveness of an innovation. She describes a framework to analyse inclusiveness through gender lenses. By observing the outcomes of an innovation on empowerment, well-being and the interactions its generates with institutions, she brings to light the effect of innovation on marginalised populations like women. This method identifies interesting lens for the analysis of the interactions between businesses producing innovation and youth, as a marginalised category instead of women.

Frugal innovations correspond not only to the outcome of a transformation but characterise the entire process itself. Frugal innovations are fluid and unpredictable. Their analysis requires a complete view and a nuanced understanding of a phenomenon that is often unstable and changing. Research in the businesses creators of frugal innovation implies the observation of complex negotiations between various actors. Some of them maybe categorised in marginalised groups like women and youth but more than that interactions include external and non-human actors. It requires to take into account the individuals as well as the institutionalised and non-institutionalised groups (Devi & Kumar, 2018).

Analysis of interactions and production of innovation is complex and unstructured. As ANT theory is insufficient to look at the production of innovation, research in this domain requires to look further than existing frameworks of innovation in order to get a clear view and a complete, nuanced understanding of the situation (Devi & Kumar, 2018).

## 2.6. *Agri-food Value Chains*

The value chain<sup>1</sup> approach allows to consider the businesses as specific actors with interactions upstream and downstream (Nutz & Sievers, 2015). This approach is interesting for this research because it allows to contextualise one organisation amongst the work of other actors with whom they might be operating. The presentation of the value chain and the activities that follows is based on the work of Nutz and Sievers, (2015) and the definition given by Neven (2014).

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<sup>1</sup> Value chain: “full range of farms and firms and their successive coordinated value-adding activities that produce particular raw agricultural materials and transform them into particular food products” (Neven, 2014)

The agri-food sector includes activities related to production, transport, processing, marketing etc. Specific actors are intervening for each of these activities and they are in relation with the other for the supply of the raw material or the selling of the product to the final consumers. Actors of the value chains are depending on each other. Each of them adds value to the product until it reaches the final consumer. There is a sense of continuity, a logic between the actors of the value chain.

One value chain corresponds to one type of product. For instance, in the milk sector, there is a value chain for bottled milk and another value chain for cow cheese. Different activities are taking place in the two value chains and that is why they are differentiated.

Services are supporting the value chains. Each actor also depends on certain types of services, for example financial services or research which catalyse the work of the organisation. Coordination services might also intervene in order to coordinate the actors of the value chain. There are also certain rules and norms that are structuring the value chain and the activities of each actor involved in it.

For each of the activities mentioned above (either in the value chain in itself or in the services and regulating activities), there is work and possible employment. The value chain approach allows to contextualise the work of the businesses that represent the focus of this study and to observe the bigger interactions and opportunities external to the businesses.

Job opportunities might be encountered within the existing pieces of value chains or might be created in the chain as additional activities or external supports and services. This framework allows to visualise the existing pieces and the potential space for new activities.

## *2.7. Interrelations of the frames and concepts*

This research investigates the interactions between two businesses and youth. The current definition of youth chosen for this exercise needs to be elaborated in the specific context of the research. Youth is a concept broadly defined as a transition period between youth and adulthood but the specifics of this transition period are very likely to be related to the local culture and to the social interactions. The research aims at findings at are the specificities in the local area of the research and in relation to the two businesses.

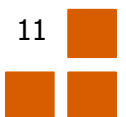
These businesses located in a developing country and belonging the agro-industry sector are producing innovation in a broad sense. Because of the products they market, of the area in which they are embedded and because of their social interactions, they can be defined as producers of frugal innovations (Leliveld & Knorringa, 2018). Their activities have a direct or indirect impact on their social and social surroundings, including on youth; and also, the other way around, businesses are affected by their social context.

This research attempts to characterise these impacts. Frameworks like “youth participation” (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018) and the “inclusiveness of frugal innovation through gender lenses” (Vossenbergh, 2018) provide guidance for the analysis. However, these frames need to be taken further in order to perceive the complete picture of the situation and get a nuanced understanding of the interactions between youth and the businesses.

Zanella et al., (2016) describe the characteristics of the creation and diffusion of innovation in developing countries. Their approach gives insights and guidance to understand the situation of

the two agrobusinesses. On the other hand, Dhakal et al., (2018) conducted a global research on youth in job markets. Their findings suggest how to approach and observe the situation of youth in Benin. The value chain approach contextualises the business approach of this research.

Together these concepts and theories guide the construction of a story about how youth on the one hand and businesses on the hand, interact together. By guiding offering me lenses and insights on how to look at a situation they allow to frame the story of my research.



### 3. Chapter 3: A research approach

This chapter describes the methodology that I used to conduct this research. I first start by describing the research set-up. Afterwards, I describe the methodology to collect data. A section is reserved to the limitations of the methodology that I chose. Then I describe the process of analysing the interviews, finishing with a reflection based on the literature on the research process.

#### 3.1. Research set-up

In this chapter I will explain how the research was set up and carried out. This project is based on qualitative data collected from ethnographic methods in the field during two months in Benin. Before this data collection period, I explored the rich literature around youth and the agri-food sector in Africa. I tried to identify gaps in the research and it allowed me to decide on a certain approach that is being described in the following sections.

##### 3.1.1. 2Scale project and selection of the businesses

My research took place in Benin where 2Scale intervened in several businesses up until 2017. 2Scale is a development project funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which strives to empower local communities by starting and developing flourishing businesses. A recent publication from this organisation highlighted the necessity to better understand the needs of young people in order to be able to target them better during future interventions.

I conducted this research in order to inform their work on the situation of youth in the field. This project provided me access to two food processing businesses in the south of Benin. Thanks to their help I was able to organise my observation and interviews in the two businesses that I had selected. Selection of the businesses was based on their availability and their interest to be the subject of my study.

2Scale intervened with both producers and processors in the past. My data collection focussed on processors for practical reasons: it was easier to get access to everybody involved in the business since workers were all located in the same area and also because processing companies are located in more urban areas where more people speak French and can be interviewed without a translator.

##### 3.1.2. Location of the businesses

The two businesses are located in the south of Benin (Figure 2).

The first one is a cooperative of transformation of soy into *Soy Goussi* (1), in Allada, in the Atlantic region. It is located about one hour from Cotonou, the capital of Benin and the place where the major part of the economic activities is happening. In Allada, I have been hosted by a Beninese family who showed me the traditions of the country and who allowed me to dive into its culture. The cooperative is located at the border of the urban area of Allada. Most of the cooperative member live in the village of Soho, about 5km from Allada and the cooperative.

The maize transformation company (2) that I visited afterwards is a much larger business than the *Soy Goussi* cooperative. It is also located in a larger city, Bohicon. Bohicon is about three hours driving from Cotonou. It is a 'crossroad city' where all means of transportation are stopping. It belongs to the Zou region. This company's office is located in Cotonou. During the time I spent in this business, I spent one day in the main office in Cotonou to interview the directors of



the company. It was important to have knowledge of their feelings and opinions on youth as managers of the company.

### 3.2. Methodology for data collection



FIGURE 2: LOCALISATION OF THE TWO BUSINESSES EXPLORED DURING THIS RESEARCH

I conducted data collection by making use of ethnographic methods and participant observation. I spent about three weeks in each of the two businesses observing practices, attitudes, interactions and interviewing the informants.

I first started my fieldwork in each of the two businesses with one week of observations and informal conversations. The goal was to first get a deep understanding of the functioning of each enterprise and to let the actors of the businesses get used to my presence and trusting me. During this first week dedicated to observation and adjustment, I first asked the managers of the company to make me do a visit and to introduce me to the other workers. The following days I tried to join the different workshops in each business and practice the activities with the workers. It allowed me to connect with the actors.

From the second week onwards, I started asking informants for formal interviews, in private, where I could ask them more personal questions. I conducted semi-structured interviews (see box 1). Depending on the interest of the informants, I sometimes let the conversation drift to subjects that they considered more important. I tried to capture the interest of the informants and his or her perceptions. In total, I conducted 15 formal interviews, recorded 10 of them and I had informal conversations with informants every day in the businesses (Appendix B: List of interviews).

The aim of this research being to understand and interpret the interactions between youth and

#### BOX 1. EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS ASKED DURING THE INTERVIEWS:

- **Related to their lifestyle:** e.g. their age, with whom they were living, if someone else contributed financially to the needs of the family, if they also had other professional activities
- **Related to their professional career:** e.g. at what age did they stop going to school, why, what activities did they undertake since then, how did they discover the business and why did they decide to join it
- **Related to their work in the business:** e.g. what were their feeling toward the business and the other actors, what they would do if they were offered another position in the business or elsewhere, what were the advantages and disadvantages of working there
- **Related to youth in general:** e.g. I asked them to define youth, to give me their opinion/explanation about youth on the job market, to explain to me their feelings towards youth, what did they perceive as their advantages or weaknesses compared to adults
- **Questions to judge their attitude:** e.g. what were their dreams for themselves or their children, why they were working in the business, what was the money for

the businesses, I did not specifically aim at interviewing every employee nor to have representative informants. I interviewed young persons but also older actors. I tried to interact with all types of employees undertaking different tasks in both businesses. However, I put the emphasis on the informants who felt the most comfortable having a conversation with me. As much as possible, I tried to have informal conversations because actors felt more relaxed and more disposed to talk about sensitive subjects and to give me details about it. Some informants seemed scared about having the conversation recorded even though I explained to them that I would be the only one listening to it. Some informants also refused to be recorded. I then took notes during the interview.

My fieldnotes include descriptions of things that I observed in the businesses (facts, events, interactions, activities...), reports on informal conversations that I had with informants but also feelings. Ethnographic fieldwork is about putting myself in the situation of my informants therefore, trying as much as possible to analyse the situation and interpret their thoughts and feelings as well as my own as a participant (Bernard, 2011).

### 3.3. *Limitations for data collection*

I conducted the data collection in French, my native language. In the urban areas, most of the men had the opportunity to study and thus to learn French. However, it was more complicated for women. In the first business - the soy cooperative - ten out of the fifteen employees did not speak French. Only one woman working in this business spoke French good enough to be able to have a conversation. In order to communicate with the other women, I tried to make use of body language or asked someone to do the translation. Thanks to body expressions I was able to reach out some of them and gain their trust. Unfortunately, the language barrier limited our exchanges. I tried to ask someone to translate my exchanges with the women but I realised that the translation was not always exact and the message were interpreted by the translator. In the second business



most of the employees were able to speak French. Language was not a problem for the data collection.

In terms of methods, the ethnographic data collection that I conducted is not meant to be representative of a large population but it is to get a deep understanding of a particular situation, being the Soy Goussi cooperative and the maize transformation company. The objective is to identify feelings and details that can only be identified through experience (Bernard, 2011). Observing activities and interactions between the businesses, having formal and informal conversations with the employees over an extended period of time allowed me to perceive their interests and capture their interactions. Nevertheless, ethnographic methods should be applied over longer periods of time than what I had the opportunity to conduct. A longer immersion in the activities of the businesses would have allowed me put myself in the position of my informants and to start feeling and thinking like them.

### *3.4. Processing and analysis of the interviews and observations*

After my fieldwork the challenge was to make sense of the stories that I heard, and to organise them in a comprehensible and meaningful manner (Kaufman, Elliott, & Shmueli, 2016). Once I was back from the field, I read my fieldnotes several times and listened to the recorded interviews in order to identify the main recurring themes in the exchanges with my informants. I browsed the literature again to connect these themes with the existing research. It allowed me to select certain frameworks. I used the frameworks and frames to structure my thoughts in a plan and to build a narrative. The challenge was to keep the complexity and the richness of the stories that I heard in a report that is meaningful and representative of the reality (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

I tried to refer to the story that I heard during my fieldwork to build a narrative that would make sense and reflect the reality of the field and the perceptions of the informants. In order to report this story, I reflected on the most important messages that my informants and I wanted to convey. I built a reporting plan that touches upon the issues that were identified during my fieldwork and connects the dots to tell the story of youth interactions with agrobusinesses in Benin.

### *3.5. Reflections on the research process and my own role*

During this research I tried to put myself in the same situation as local youth within agrobusinesses. My task was sometimes difficult because of the cultural differences and obvious hints concerning my nationality which created a distance with my interlocutors. I encountered difficulties reaching out to actors of the first business in particular. The language barrier, the difference in terms of education made it difficult for me to create a good relationship with them in such a short time. In order to facilitate this process, I tried to participate in their daily activities and spend as much time as possible with them. The fact that only men of a certain age spoke French also contributed to the barrier between me and my informants. It was hard to find common points to start conversations. Eventually I was able to conduct some formal interviews with the managers and it provided me interesting data. It is mostly descriptive as it was hard to get an impression of their feelings but it is still relevant for the research.

In the second business my integration happened much more smoothly. Actors welcomed me warmly and were more open to discussions. The business was located more in the centre of the city and Bohicon is a bigger city than Allada. Actors of the business were more educated, more curious about my presence and all able to speak French with me. I was able to participate in the daily activities and to exchange with almost everybody. Because I was able to connect more with the actors of the second business I also collected more data there. It allowed me to interpret the difference between the two businesses in terms of productivity and openness, and the consequences it has in terms of participation for youth.

My interpretations might be biased by my European culture, I certainly observed and compared things referring to what is most familiar to me. It allowed me to detect elements that were missing or different compared to what I am used to. For instance, it might have felt natural for a local person to observe the respect and the specific attitude youth was adopting when they were addressing their hierarchical superior but I immediately noticed that youth behaved differently when they were talking with an adult. They all acted like they were somehow impressed or submitted to the adult in front of them. This cultural difference was an advantage for me in the analysis of mundane activities. But on the other hand, it might have kept me from appreciating all the nuances of the Beninese culture especially in terms of interactions, it is possible that I failed to perceive very discrete behaviours which impact social interactions.

Because of my implication as a participant, my interpretations might not be entirely objective. I took part in this research, I involved myself with the participants and tried to create connections with them in order to hear about their feelings, opinions and personal matters. Since I was a participant, my feelings also represent relevant data for the research. But for this reason, the way I perceived things might have been biased by my relations with the informants and my own experience and opinion. In order to limit this bias, I tried to reflect on my own position as a research and my own agency on the data. At the end of this report I will discuss more in depth the implications of my own involvement and the impact it may have had on the thesis.

Furthermore, my position as a white girl might have oriented the behaviour of my informants who would possibly have expressed the different feelings to someone of the same gender and culture. As I interacted personally with the informants, my own attitude had an impact on the research but also on my informants as it is part of a communication process (Leeuwis, 2013). Because my appearance and my culture are different from the local people, it provoked certain reactions on the informants. Some of them could have been impressed, mistrusting or on the contrary curious and interested. As I mentioned previously, that is why I let some time at the beginning of my fieldwork before starting the interviews to let my informants get to know me. Nevertheless, these feelings never really disappear, they can change over time but they are different from one person to another and that is why another researcher would have created different reactions on the informants and would maybe have collected slightly different information.

## 4. Chapter 4: Objects of study

Both businesses that I studied are food transformation businesses. The first one is located in Allada, 60 km from Cotonou. The second one is based in Bohicon, a city 130 km away from Cotonou. Although Bohicon is a much larger city, both businesses are located in urban areas. Actors with whom I interacted, interviewed and observed are living in urban areas where access to basic services such as health care and education is easier in than decentralised places.

### 4.1. A small and traditional cooperative

#### 4.1.1. Soy Goussi as a flagship product

The first place where I did participant observation is a small cooperative of soy transformation. Located in the "Atlantic" region, about 60 km away from Cotonou in Allada. Fifteen members come every day from Monday to Friday to sort soy seeds, press them into *Soy Goussi*, roast it and sell it in the shop at the entrance of the cooperative. *Soy Goussi* (SG) is the main product of the cooperative (Appendix C: Story and pictures of Soy Goussi). Because of its cheap production cost and high nutritional value, it is now an appreciated food product for the local consumers who cannot afford to eat meat because of its price. For this reason, it can be considered as a frugal innovation after the definition given by (Devi & Kumar, 2018).

The cooperative also sells the coproducts of the SG transformation like soy oil for human consumption; powder and roasted seeds for animal husbandry. Mainly private individuals come to buy SG at the shop for their own consumption. They usually buy between 1 and 5kg of the product. Sometimes retailers also come by to buy larger quantities between 25 and 50 kg. Afterwards, these retailers repackage the product and sell it to further markets in the Atlantic region. Soy oil can be sold in pre-filled bottles or retailed for a lower price.

#### 4.1.2. Activities at the cooperative

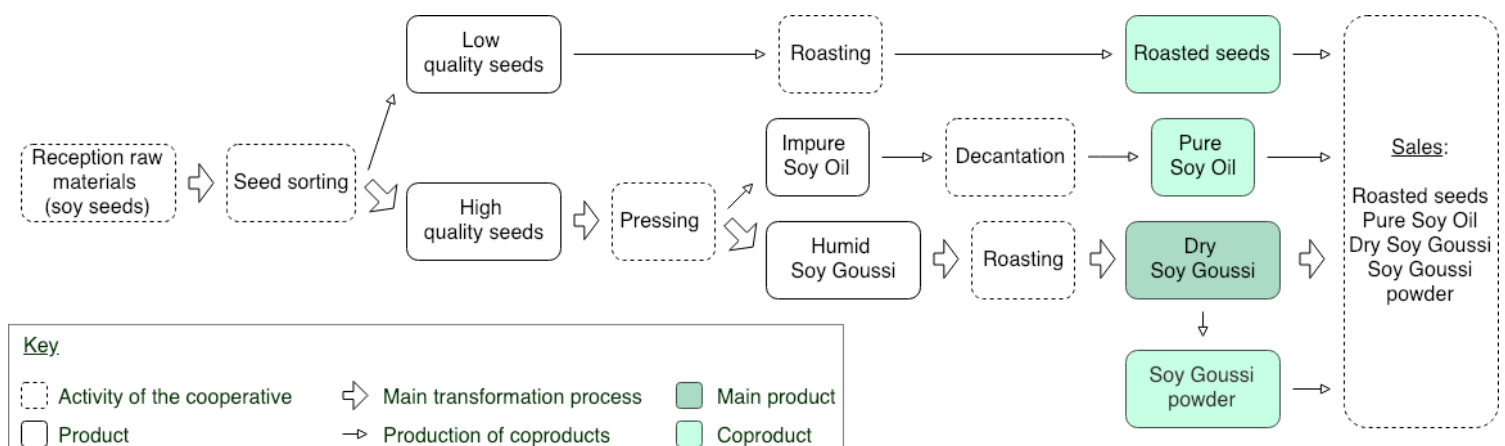


FIGURE 3 : TRANSFORMATION ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTS AT THE COOPERATIVE

The figure above (Figure 3) summarises the activities undertaken during the production of SG. The head of the production is responsible for the reception of raw materials. Operative women are involved in seed sorting, pressing and roasting activities. The saleswoman is in charge of selling the products in the shop.

During the first phase of the production, women take bags of raw materials and sort the high-quality seeds from those of lower quality. Afterwards, high-quality seeds are put in the two pressing machines that the cooperative owns. Oil comes out on one side. It is placed in big containers for decantation. Humid SG comes out on the other side and is brought in the roasting workshop. There, women roast SG for at least 20 minutes in order to reduce the humidity and improve the conservation of the product. Lastly, bags of dry SG are disposed in a storage room before their transfer to the shop.

Several co-products come out of the production process. Low-quality seeds are roasted and sold to animal breeders. SG powder appears during the roasting due to friction. It is isolated and also sold to animal breeders. Soy oil, after decantation is sold to individual consumers and retailers.

#### 4.1.3. Internal structure of the cooperative

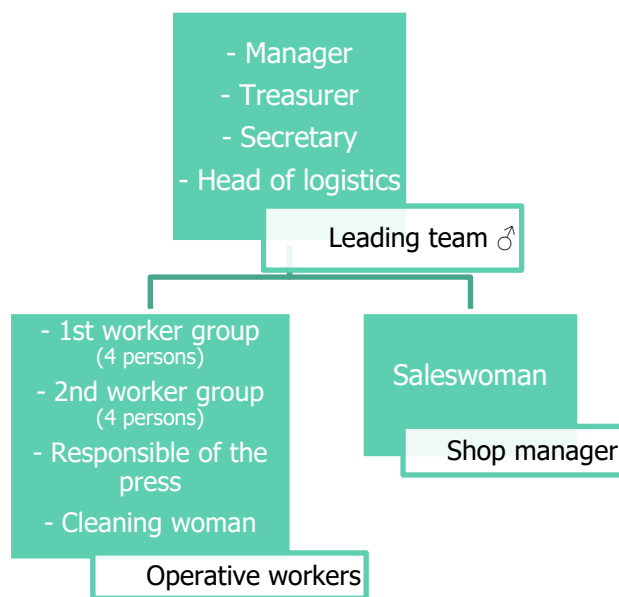


FIGURE 4: ORGANISATIONAL CHART SG COOPERATIVE

Ten women are operative workers. Eight women are divided into two groups of four rotating every week between the sorting and roasting workshops. One woman is responsible for the press and the last one is in charge of cleaning the facilities.

Most of these women are more than 30 years old and have children. When their children are under six years old, they are not yet going to school so they follow their mother in their professional activities. Hence in the cooperative compound, many children between zero and six years old spend their day, playing around and/or sleeping on the back of their mother. Operatives have to multitask: they need to be productive in their work and watch for their children in the meantime.

While men and the saleswoman are paid a fixed amount every month, operative women chose to be paid weekly. They receive their salary each Friday. The amount depends on their production during the week. In order to calculate this, every evening the head of logistics weights the bags of seeds which have been sorted and associates it with the woman who did it. Equally, he weights the roasted Goussi and calculates the salary of the workers depending on the amount that was produced and roasted during the day. The work of all the members is declared thus, they all have access to social protection and health insurance.

Members of the cooperative are persons involved in the production or management, plus a president and the keeper. In terms of internal organisation, the cooperative is led by a manager, a treasurer, a secretary and the head of logistics (Figure 4). All of them are men. Women only assume operative functions. They are in charge of all the transformation processes and only one woman is handling the shop and the marketing of the product. Except for the saleswoman, none of the female members speaks French. They speak in their local language: Fon. Also, they are not able to read and write.

Ten women are operative workers. Eight women are divided into two groups of four

#### 4.1.4. Working conditions

Work at the cooperative starts around 9 am and finishes at 6 pm every weekday from Monday to Friday.

When women are working at the seed sorting workshop, they have the possibility to invite members of their families or friends to help with their task. Having help allow them to sort larger quantities of seeds in one week and to be paid more. For this reason, often female children of the workers often come to help their mother. For instance, some girls come every day after school to work with their mother.

However, access to the roasting workshop is more controlled for hygiene reasons. Women have to do the work themselves and are not allowed to receive help from external people.

The work of women, along with the work of the head of logistics is physically demanding. At the sorting workshop, activities are happening on the floor. Women also have to raise important charges, bags and containers of seeds that sometimes exceed 50kg. At the roasting workshop, temperatures are very high and smoke disturbs the work of women. The head of logistics transfers the bags from the storage facilities to the processing rooms. He also carries heavy bags and containers.

A well is located in the cooperative compound, all workers constantly have access to drinkable water. Leaders of the cooperative are also reflecting on possibilities to set up fans in working areas to reduce inconvenience caused by hot temperatures and improve the working conditions.

#### 4.1.5. Youth at the cooperative

Of the sixteen permanent workers of the cooperative, only three persons are 35 years old or below. The saleswoman is the youngest member of the cooperative, she is 32 years old and has two children. The head of logistics is 35 years old and has two children as well. One operative woman is 35 as well and has three children.

Youth is present in the cooperative as help for the operative workers and replacement when they are in incapacity to come to work. For instance, a young girl is coming to work instead of her mother every two weeks when her team has to roast the SG. Her mother is sick and she cannot stay in the heat and smoke of the roasting area. Because the family does not want to lose the money every two weeks, the 14 years old teenage girl has to work instead of her mother.

Another 13 years old daughter comes to work with her mother for the seed sorting. Together they are more productive and it allows them to earn more money for the family. Similarly, two other women ask for help from external persons to increase their productivity with the seed sorting as well. At the end of the week, they divide the money they made between the member and the external help.

These external workers, whether they come from the family of one member or not, are considered to be occasional workers; they are not members of the cooperative. They are only supposed to come when the workload is heavier. They are often young girls. The two persons I met were aged of 18 and 25 years old. They are out of school, sometimes for a long time, and could not find a stable job. Occasional work at the cooperative allows them to earn some money for living but they usually aspire to become permanent members of the cooperative when a position becomes vacant.

#### 4.1.6. Recruitment of new employees

Most of the women working now in the cooperative, including occasional workers, got in their position because they knew someone from the cooperative who allowed them to get the position. Half of the operative workers replaced their mother or one of their family members. Moreover, most of the members now come from the same village. This is due to the fact that when the cooperative was created, they looked for new workers in their personal networks which are often limited in terms of space.

Criteria to recruit operational workers are limited. During an informal conversation, the head of logistics and the managers mentioned that they do not look at the skills and knowledge of potential candidates but only ask them if they are comfortable with the roasting workshop. They said they would prefer someone who cooked cassava before because the process is very similar to the production of SG so it gives an advantage in terms of learning.

In order to recruit a person for the managing team of the cooperative, they would require that this person speaks French fluently and is able to read and write. Men currently working in the cooperative went to school until 15 years old. They talk a good French, are able to read and write it correctly. They also all have basic notions of mathematics. During our conversation, the head of logistics and the manager insisted that the most important criterion for the recruitment of a manager is that the candidate has to be trustable. Because of this criterion, they often look in their own network if they know someone who would accept the position. For instance, current managers have been chosen because they used to be mechanics, drivers or do manual jobs and good feedback came from their chiefs or clients.

As a conclusion, the recruitment of both men and women is only happening within the personal network of the cooperative members and this is mainly due to trust issues. Problems with previous employees who stole money from the cooperative made them suspicious of external persons. "Betrayal" and "bad work" are expressions which came back relatively often during my conversations with the managers.

However, the recruitment of women is less problematic than men because their salary depends on the amount of work they produce. Hence a woman has to work well to be paid sufficiently to make a living. Moreover, women work in groups all the time and they do not have access to the office the risks they would steal from the company is less high because they can watch each other and do not have direct access to the valuables of the company.

#### 4.1.7. Development projects

Since its creation the cooperative has been supported by several development projects. They received micro-financing which was mainly used to buy new machines and tools or repair the ones that were broken. They also received trainings to improve the marketing of the products, improve hygiene and security in the cooperative compound. Some trainings were given to the manager, treasurer and the head of logistics in order to improve their organisation. 2Scale also linked the cooperative with a consortium of producers to insure continuous provisioning of soy, adequate quality and advantageous prices.

Recent projects funded rehabilitation of some buildings. The press room was renovated, the roasting workshop was improved. New installations limit the amount of smoke that comes into the



room so workers do not breathe it too much. The shop was redesigned to appear more inviting to customers.

Development projects improved the working conditions of the cooperative members. The salesperson and the manager also agree to say that it helped increasing the sales of SG and coproducts. Thanks to the intervention of development projects like 2Scale, they extended their marketing strategies and started targeting a wider range of consumers in a wider area. They are now promoting SG in markets in several cities in the Atlantic region of Benin. In order to target richer consumers, they now offer a specific packaging that is more attractive. All actors mentioned that sales increased since they received help from 2Scale and other development projects.

At the moment, all projects ended and they now have to innovate without external support in order to keep the cooperative profitable. Receiving interns is also a way for them to receive external inputs on their work. The last intern they received helped them improve the organisation of the production monitoring system. She also helped the manager with the accounting.

## 4.2. *A modern and industrial enterprise*

### 4.2.1. Transformation and products

The dominant crop in Benin is staple maize. It can be declined in multiple different meals. The most common being the “*pâte*” which can literally be translated by “dough”. It is made out of maize flour and can be seasoned differently by adding tomato for example or by keeping only the starch of the flour (Palomares, 2000). Maize flour is consequently an important resource for Beninese inhabitants. It presents the advantage of being cost effective: it is nourishing, cheap and can be prepared in many different ways.

The second business in which I collected data transforms maize not only into flour for human consumption but also in grits for industrial breweries and bran for animal consumption (Appendix D: Pictures of the maize company).

#### **BOX 2. MAIN PRODUCT OF THE MAIZE TRANSFORMATION COMPANY**

**1- Grits:** The maize transformation process produces 50-52% of grits, 35% of bran and 10-12% of flour, the rest being dust and waste. These products appear once the grain is cleaned, and the endosperm is separated from the germ and the bran layer. The endosperm is used to produce the grits.

Grits is a fermentescible product. That is why breweries are demanding it. Sales of grits are contracted with the national brewery. Production is determined depending on the quantities ordered by the brewery. When the brewery demands high quantities of grits, the factory functions during day and night and production of bran and flour also increases, thus topping up stocks.

Sales of grits do not allow to cover for all the production costs.

The factory started its activities in 2001 after a few years of experimentation which allowed to adjust the settings of the various machines. Its main purpose was to produce grits for national brewery (Box 2.1.). Bran and flour are only coproducts of the transformation of maize into grits (Box 2.2.). However, the commercial strategy of the society is nowadays shifting to orient the focus on flour for human consumption instead of grits. Managers of the society expressed that they wanted to reinforce the sales of flour and promote it in larger areas in the country.



**BOX 3. CO-PRODUCT OF THE MAIZE TRANSFORMATION COMPANY**

**2- Flour:** Maize flour is much appreciated by Beninese inhabitants. However, this enterprise encounters difficulties selling flour. There are different reasons for these poor sales.

- Production of grits is constantly increasing because the brewery constantly asks more of this material. Thus, stocks of flour are growing and the enterprise is not yet able to sell as much flour as it produces.
- Price of the flour sold by this society is higher than what can be found in local markets. However, quality is also better. Indeed, the factory has to respect a certain number of rules regarding hygiene. Hence the product is safer than traditionally transformed flour. Also, the factory adds additives in order to prevent deficiencies. Flour sold by the company is more nutritional and safer than what can be bought on local markets but it is not sufficient for local inhabitants to prefer it.

Bran and grits are sold and transported in bags of 40kg. However, flour is being packaged in smaller bags of 5kg in order to be sold to individual consumers. The factory includes a large area dedicated to storage of products. This area is almost entirely full with bags of flour and bran. Some of the flour bags kept in this unit are over 6 months old, meaning they cannot be sold for human consumption. Sometimes animal breeders buy this flour for their cattle because it is rich in nutrient and cheaper than other products on the market.

This storage creates a lot of loss for the company. It shows that coproducts of the production of grits are much harder to sell than grits itself and that is the reason why managers of the company explained to me that they wanted to change the strategy of the company.

**3- Bran:** Bran is destined to animal consumption. Just like flour, big quantities of this product are stored in the factory. Production is going faster than sales. However, bran is cheaper than flour and it does not have an expiry date. Hence considering the lower value of bran and its ability to be stored for long, this product is less problematic than flour.

#### 4.2.2. A multi-stakeholder company

The company now includes two sites. The production site where is the factory, is located in Bohicon, 130 km away from Cotonou. Managers decided to have the direction office in Cotonou because it is located closer to the brewery which receives the grits and which is the main client of the company.

The construction of the factory started in 1970 by the Beninese state during the communist period. In 1985 about 75% of the factory was built but construction stopped. In 1994 after an entrepreneur bought it construction work started again and in 1998 first trials with the new machines were made.

The Beninese entrepreneur who bought the factory from the state in 1994 already knew that breweries were looking for grits. He established the first contract with them. Nowadays he retired but his child still owns the major part of the company.

The investment that the entrepreneur made allowed to have more than 35 persons working for the company today.

#### 4.2.3. Internal structure of the company

The figure below (Figure 5) presents the organisation and the hierarchical relations between the employees of the maize transformation company. The company is being directed by three board members whose office is located in Cotonou.

The organisation of the company is hierarchical. Each person has a leader, a manager or a director to whom he has to respond. Occasional workers are under the lead of team leaders or sometimes even other plant operatives. Decision making is happening at the top of hierarchical pyramid, workers are expected to do the job they have been assigned to and if there are problems they should discuss them with their hierarchical superior.

**Production site managers** - The production site is led by an administrative and financial manager and a technical manager. While the technical manager only took this position a couple of years ago after working as an operative since the factory became operational, the administrative and financial manager came from Cotonou and was hired when he had just finished his accounting studies. Both of them are men of respectively 50 and 35 years old. Their secretary is a woman of 59 years old.

**Shop, laboratory and storage units** - The production site of Bohicon also includes a shop and a laboratory. Both are run by a woman who started about 20 years ago as an operative and was asked after a couple of years to take responsibilities in the laboratory. She is now close to retirement but has the exclusive responsibility of both the shop and the laboratory.

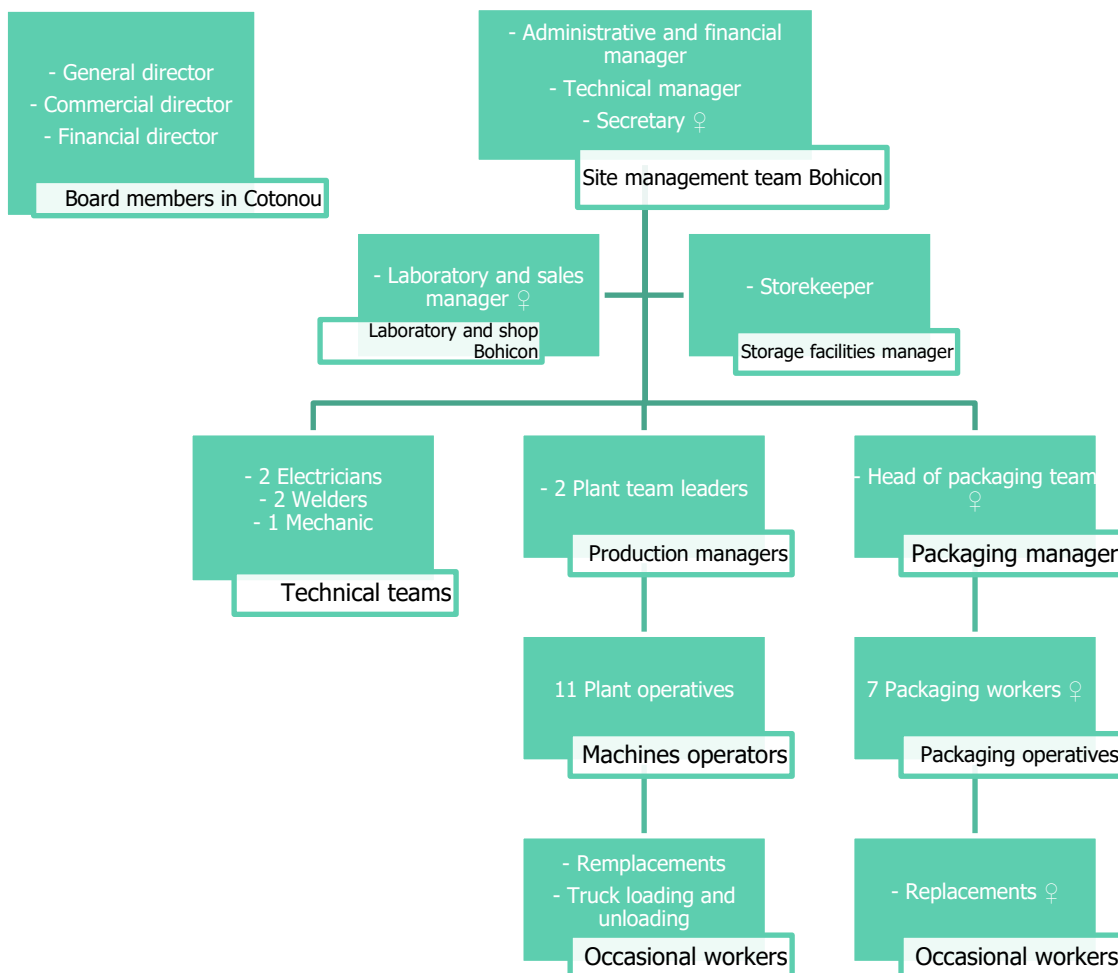


FIGURE 5: ORGANISATION CHART MAIZE TRANSFORMATION COMPANY

The storekeeper is a man who also worked first as an operative before taking higher responsibilities. The technical manager, the laboratory and sales manager and the storekeeper all went to school until 12 to 18 years old but did not have the opportunity to pursue higher education studies. However, their ability to read and write allowed them to reach higher positions in the company. The technical manager even had the opportunity to do mechanical trainings after he started working in the company. Those mechanical trainings were funded by a development project in a partnership with the company, they had to take place after the working day.

**Technical and operative workers** - Workers from the technical teams all had the opportunity to receive a training in a specific domain: either electricity, welding or mechanic. Both electricity and welding teams include two persons one of them being the manager of the other.

Operative workers are working in teams each managed by one leader. There are two production teams and two team leaders because the factory operates every week day, from Monday to Friday during 16h from 6 am to 10 pm. The first team works from 6 am to 2 pm, the second team starts at 2 pm and finishes at 10 pm.

The plant requires nine operators and one team leader to function correctly. Currently, there are eleven permanent plant operatives divided into two teams, welders and mechanics reinforce these teams when they are not needed somewhere else and occasional workers complete the teams so that ten persons constantly work in the factory. Usually two occasional workers join the plant operative teams.

**Occasional workers** - Occasional workers are also needed to unload the trucks of raw materials when they arrive at the factory, to transfer bags of products to the storage units and to load trucks with grits, bran or flour when needed. There are no permanent workers assigned at this position because these tasks are punctual. When a permanent worker cannot join his working station or when welders and mechanics are needed in other places, they are replaced by occasional workers.

**Packaging activities by women** - In parallel of these production activities in the factory, the packaging team, made up of women only works in a specific room to condition flour in smaller bags, label them with the date of production and the expiry date of the product. Occasional women workers are invited to work with the team when one of the permanent workers is not available.

Mostly men are working in the factory. Women are assigned to the packaging activities; one woman is the secretary of the production site managers and one woman is in charge of the laboratory and the shop.

Of the 35 employees of the production site, five persons are aged between 28 and 35 years old. There are younger persons working in the factory but only as occasional workers. Three of the occasional workers are less than 30 years old and doing replacement tasks.

#### 4.2.4. Working conditions

Permanent workers of the company are declared to the state. They have access to health insurances and retirement pensions. Pregnant women have the possibility to take a maternity leave. They can take one month of holiday per year. Many decide not to take holidays during several years in order to be able to take two or three months of holidays at once.

**Wage** - In average, operative workers are paid 10% more than the national minimum wage. However, many of the workers I discussed with, acknowledged having a second professional

activity outside of working hours. For instance, one electrician told me he was working for private individuals to earn more money in order to save for the education of his children. One occasional worker that I interviewed explained to me that when he was assigned to tasks in the plants during 8h with one of the team in the morning or the afternoon, he would stay during the rest of the day in the company and wait to help load or unload trucks if needed.

**Working relationships** - Workers have the possibility to take breaks when they need. The team leader manages these breaks.

The technical manager visits the factory very often during the day in order to supervise the work and help when needed. It also allows him to talk to the employees. Usually when there is a problem, the person refers his or her leader who can talk to the technical manager or the administrative or financial manager. However, there are also two employees' representatives who have been elected by the permanent workers in order to represent them at some of the board meeting. They mainly become active when a problem is being felt. For instance, at the end of the year 2018 workers expected an increase in their salary since the previous years it did not happened.

Directors of the company, from the board, do not come to the company very often, only when needed. In order to keep themselves updated of the situation, they are in frequent contact with the administrative and financial manager over the phone.

**Physical tasks** - Only men are hired as occasional workers to work in the factory outside of the packaging workshop or to load and unload the trucks. I have been told that is because the work in the factory is very physical, heavy weights have to be transported and it is better to have young men working for this.

The factory is a building of five levels which are at least 3 meters high from the floor to the ceiling. Team managers need to be in a good physical condition because they spend a lot of time walking up and down the stairs to supervise the work and the workers.

Women also have to transport bags of flour. Work is organised so that they do not have to transport things far from their working stations and so that weight is lighter than what men can lift but they also have to be in a good physical condition.

**Team spirit** - During one of my conversation with the technical manager, he expressed regrets that the team spirit slowly deteriorates in the company because no actions are taken to improve it. There used to be a white man at the technical management position. Every once in a while, he was inviting the workers to lunch or to an after-work drink. He used to pay with his own money for everybody. When he left this tradition disappeared. The current technical manager who appreciated a lot these moments expressed regrets that he was not able to be as generous as his predecessor. These moments used to bound all workers and teams together, to improve communication between all the employees and create good working relationship. Since they stopped communication is deteriorating and complains are becoming more frequent.

However, I observed that workers of the factory, especially older employees, keep good relationships. Every morning people greet each other in a warm way. Several men are frequently visiting the packaging workshop where the women work, to talk with them, offer help. This contributes to inclusion of women and enjoyable working atmosphere.

I observed a lot of smiles and nice greetings during my data collection in the society. Workers seem to show a strong respect for hierarchy but team leaders and the technical managers are also very attentive to the wellbeing of their subordinates.

#### 4.2.5. Recruitment of new employees

**Physical ability** - As the work in the factory is physical for almost every employee, they all need to be in good health conditions. The technical manager is in charge of recruiting occasional workers and also participate in choosing the permanent workers. He mentioned preferring to hire young people rather than old ones, even though they may have more experience because young people have more energy and strength to do physical jobs. He told me that above 30 years old, he would not recruit someone as an occasional worker.

**Ability to read and write** - When I asked the administrative and financial manager whether it was important for an occasional or an operative worker to know how to speak French or even to read and write, he answered that “technically it is not a problem... However, we noticed that people who studied at least a little are more able to do the job. They are more reactive and motivated”. Currently five of the seven packaging workers do not speak French. They are not able to read and write it either. Because the two others went at the same time on a maternity leave and on holidays, only the leader was able to do the labelling of the bags. Hence the company had to hire a new literate occasional worker for this specific labelling task. This situation shows that educated workers offer stability and flexibility to the company and other employees.

**Recruitment procedure** - Most of the operative workers of the plant were first employed as occasional workers before being offered a position as a permanent worker. When the technical manager sees their work as occasional he has the opportunity to observe their motivation and ability for the job. Hence, he knows who to trust and to recruit as an operative. Technical workers like electricians, welders and mechanics are recruited depending on their diplomas, experience and motivation. The board members are participating in the decision. For management positions, the board members are in charge of taking the decision. For instance, to recruit the current administrative and financial manager of the production site, they issued an advertisement for the position in Cotonou and they hired someone who was part of their personal network.

#### 4.2.6. Youth at the company

Youth working at the company mainly takes on occasional positions. As well for the work in the plant as for the packaging, a good physical condition is required. Young people are assigned to physical tasks. They also have to show a good flexibility. At the packaging workshop, I observed that the occasional worker was asked to change working station more often than the other ladies. Indeed, every time someone has to leave their station for a reason, the leader would ask her to stop what she was doing and replace the missing woman. Similarly, when bags needed to be moved from one side of the room to the other she had to do it.

Because they take on occasional positions, young people cannot choose what they will be doing. They are called when there is a need for a new worker but the most often they come to do the task, the more they are susceptible to be called again. The technical manager pays attention to their ability, motivation, the quality of their work and it determines whether they will be called the next time or not.

Because they are occasional workers, their work is not declared to the state. They cannot benefit from health insurances, maternity leaves. They are in precarious positions.

This situation is due to the large amount of unemployed young people on the job market. Many are looking for jobs and ready to accept any type of position in order to earn some money. Companies like the maize transformation one, receive many applications and have the possibility to choose the best ones. Because young people are desperate for jobs they are willing to accept very precarious positions. Companies do not feel obligated to make contracts with young people nor to provide decent working positions, hence completing this vicious circle of youth precariousness.

### 4.3. *Youth, a marginalised group in crisis*

#### 4.3.1. What is youth in Benin?

In order to define youth, many international organisations use an age criterion. For instance, the United Nations refer to individuals between 15 and 24 years old. However, the African Union considers the individuals between 15 and 35 years old. The difference between the two definitions finds its explanation in the reasoning that African people access jobs and financial stability later than other populations because of the status of the job markets on the continent (Barlet et al., 2016).

No international convention yet exists to describe youth as a specific part of the population (Barlet et al., 2016; Blum, 2007). Barlet et al., (2016) worked on a conceptual definition of youth. They refer to it as a transition period between childhood and adulthood. Although they mention that this period is associated to specific tastes and activities and that the end is marked by major events, my findings go further and suggest that youth in Benin is mostly defined by a certain mindset and social perceptions.

Most of the interviewees started describing youth by their physical abilities. They mentioned the "strength" and the "energy" of youth to achieve certain types of work. However, when I tried to encourage the reflection a little bit further with them, they also mentioned "flexibility", "carelessness" as characteristics of youth. From my observations, I interpreted that the main difference between youth and older people is the type of responsibility they support. In other words, young people have to think about themselves, about their own future. They ask themselves questions like "What do I want to become?", "What type of job do I want to do?", "Where do I want to live?". Older people cannot think only about themselves anymore but they have to consider the needs of their family. Often, they have to take the responsibility of their children, parents, husband or wives and they cannot only think for themselves anymore. While getting older and gaining responsibilities and stability, it seems like individuals stop asking themselves questions about their own future.

Very often older people mentioned in the interviews and informal discussions that we had, that their motivation to work hard was driven by the wish to offer a good education to their children later. In practice, this means that youth is more flexible in terms of working hours, working places. They can also afford to earn less money than if they do not have to bear the responsibility of a family member.

Some persons already have a family and a permanent position but they aspire to more. For instance, the administrative manager of the maize transformation company mentioned that he was



still following classes to become an expert accountant. He explained that he hoped to move back to Cotonou and start his own accounting enterprise. But time was pressing for him because his children are growing up and soon it would become harder for them to move from Bohicon because they would have settled their social life there. He could be an example of someone at the edge of the transition between youth and adulthood. He still thinks about his own future and dreams, but starts considering the needs of his family and he is conscious that soon he will not be able to freely take all the decisions he wants because it could affect negatively the wellbeing of his family.

As for the transition between childhood and youth, in this research I consider individuals who have, at least, the legal age to be working. Indeed, because I collected data in two enterprises I was in touch with individuals who were at least 18 years old and I was not able to focus on the transition between childhood and youth.

#### BOX 4. PROPOSITION OF CRITERIA TO DIFFERENTIATE YOUTH FROM ADULTS

- **Physical ability:** young people are physically able to do harder tasks and have more energy to dedicate to work
- **Self-responsibility:** young people reached enough maturity to take responsibilities for their own actions but they still do not have to bear the responsibility of other family members
- **Estimated age:** the age of the person can give an idea of their situation if there is no possibility to exchange with him or her or to talk to their relatives. Persons between 18 and 24 years old are very likely to be in this period.
- **Children, marriage, stable job...:** as mentioned by Barlet et al., (2016) major events like the birth of a child, a marriage or moving out of the family house can be indicators of the transition between youth and adulthood. However, just like the age, they may lead to inexact assumptions if not confirmed by an assessment of the mind-set of the person.

To conclude, youth in Benin is a transition period from childhood to adulthood. However, this period is difficult to define because during youth each individual navigates through different stages where he or she progressively gain maturity, responsibilities and physically changes. Youth does not follow strict rules and is societally constructed. It corresponds to a certain period of life where both the mind-set of the individual and its place in society progressively change. It is very difficult to operationalise this concept with concrete markers such as the birth of a child or a wedding because youth is highly related to abstract perception of the person by him or herself and by their personal circle. I observed persons of 27, 32 or even 35 years old who could be considered as young persons. However, some persons of 30 years old or more were already adults in terms of the responsibilities they were bearing towards their family.

Finally, youth is relative to the context in which it is stated. For instance, the administrative and finance manager of the maize company said "it is appreciable that responsibilities are given to young people" referring to the financial director of the company who is 40 years old. In Benin, directors and managers are usually experienced persons in their 50s or 60s. The fact that someone of 40 years old already holds important responsibilities in a company is rare, and in this situation, it is considered being young for the position.

#### 4.3.2. Young people in the Beninese society

Demography in Benin, just like in other west African countries is increasing (INSAE, 2018). Today, half of the population is 18 years old or less (UNDP, 2018) and in 2012, 20% of the youth between 15 and 24 years old were neither schooled nor employed (ILO, 2012).



Young people encounter difficulties finding jobs and only reach stable living situations after their 30 years old. During my data collection I noticed that, except for one person, no one under 30 years old had a permanent job; all worked as occasional workers in the hope of being offered a permanent position after a while. Young people in Benin live in precarious situations.

Family in Benin is a very important social support. Young unemployed people often live with their families. Usually parents or siblings support young persons by sharing housing and daily expenses. One old person from the SG cooperative, who is already a grand-father mentioned that young people had the advantage of being flexible in terms of working location particularly because if they needed to travel far in order to work, the rest of the family could still take care of the wives and children.

Beninese society is mainly patriarchal (Kinkingninhoun-Médagbé, Diagne, Simtowe, Agboh-Noameshie, & Adégbola, 2010). Men are dominating the society, even if women receive a lot of respect in the family circle, men are those who take decisions. It is felt like a duty for men to provide everything that their family need. Furthermore, elderly people are chiefs of the family. Because of their experience of life and their wisdom they are respected and listened to by following generations.

Therefore, youth and especially young girls are obliged to satisfy the needs and wishes of their family members. Even if family can be very supportive to youth, it is also a source of societal pressure that force the young person into certain direction, certain jobs and activities that he or she may not naturally aspire to. Dhakal et al., (2018:112) referred to this phenomenon as “history legacies”. They mention that it has an impact not only on potential employment opportunities but also on “whether or not parents can or cannot provide financial and other support for their adult children”.

#### 4.3.3. Access to education

Many of the young people I met in Benin mentioned that they did not have the possibility to follow a higher education. Most of the time they argue that their financial situation kept them from pursuing studies. Some actors also revealed they had other obligations towards their family impeaching them to go to university.

Furthermore, I noticed that graduating from *collège*<sup>2</sup> or high school can also be a major difficulty for young Beninese persons. While some parents can afford to pay for private lessons after school for their children, some others cannot pay for it and sometimes even need students to help them with certain tasks after school. While some parents went to school and speak fluently French, some others did not have the opportunity to study and are not able to help their children with their homework.

Polygamy is very frequent in Benin. In this situation, fathers often have a lot of children and it is hard to support all of them. Children born of polygamists’ marriages receive less attention from the father and more from the mother. Furthermore, if the father cannot provide enough to his wives and descendants, women should work. Consequently, they have less time to grant to the education. It is for instance the situation that I observed with most of the operative women in the

<sup>2</sup> French word: type of school between primary school and high school in the Beninese system. Children between 11 and 15 years old attend it.

SG business. During my interviews, many of them complained they had to work because their husband was not able to provide enough for the entire family.

Chances to succeed at school are then very unequal. Even within the same families, elders are more solicited than the rest of children, giving them less opportunities to focus on their education and fewer chances of success.

Many workers of all ages that I interviewed in the factory mentioned they had to stop their studies either because they could not afford to pay for more or because even after several trials they were not able to pass their end-of-studies diplomas. Even if primary education is free in Benin, it is still common that many children stop going to school after 15 years old because they have to start earning money for their families.

During one of the interviews I had with an occasional worker from the maize transformation factory, he mentioned the "pressure of his family". He felt like he had to financially support his family, even if it meant giving up on his own dreams otherwise they would be likely to "exclude" him. These same reasons are driving elders to work earlier than the rest of their siblings to bring money in and attend to their needs. Local people even talk about the "sacrifice" of the first child to the benefice of the others.

To conclude, my observations show that not every young Beninese has the opportunity to receive a good education. Because of family pressure, lack of money, or lack of support some young people are forced to look for a job very early in their lives meanwhile they do not have any professional education.

#### 4.3.4. Access to the job market

In their paper Dhakal et al., (2018) noticed financial issues on a global scale. They describe the financial inequalities of youth and their ability or not to afford studies. But they also mention that graduates can encounter difficulties accessing jobs.

In the same line of thought, Baba-Moussa (2017) in his paper criticises the politics around education in Benin because they do not allow a good orientation of young people. He explains that Beninese students are not provided with sufficient information to become aware of the opportunities in each sector and to take the good decisions regarding their future. Moreover, he argues that there is a social devaluation of craftsmanship, technical activities and agriculture which leads to students pursuing higher studies in intellectual areas only. Consequently, there is a lack of interest of students for certain sectors and a bad distribution of qualifications in the job market.

It can be observed in Benin that those who have the possibility to pursue higher studies mainly decide to go to university and learn intellectual knowledge meanwhile industries, agricultural activities require professionals with skills in technical domains. One of the main consequences of this is that even graduates with university diplomas are having problems finding jobs at the end of their studies. Sometimes they also have to find jobs in a completely different sector than the one they have been studying. It is called the "mismatch" between graduates and employers (Dhakal et al., 2018).

I exchanged with a 27 years old occasional worker of the maize company who stopped a few years ago his studies in biology because he realised this type of education did not correspond to what was needed on the job market. He is now working as an occasional worker at the maize company,

doing extra hours in order to save money to pay himself a training to become a technician in electricity and industrial maintenance. He aspired to this diploma and the position it could give him after working for a few years in a cotton transformation industry. It made him aware of the opportunities available in this type of factory and gave him the taste for technical operations.

Because students are not well informed of professional opportunities available on the job market, they often choose topics corresponding to sectors which are already saturated and do not provide many employment opportunities for new graduates. In Benin, the job market is saturated with persons of similar backgrounds and whose qualifications do not correspond to the type of skills industries and enterprises are expecting. It is responsible for a lot of unemployment amongst young people. It also contributes to the lack of motivation of young persons.

Some young persons with whom I had the opportunity to exchange, expressed frustration towards this matter. The fact that even university graduates encounter difficulties on the job market discourages them to study or actively search for interesting job opportunities. Indeed, stories from graduates and about the professional situation of youth gives untrained persons the impression that the situation of youth in job markets is hopeless and it discourages them.

Individuals from impoverished backgrounds, who did not have the opportunity to pursue higher studies or even to go to high school are often the ones who encounter the most important difficulties accessing information. They do not always own mobile phones or have access to internet. When they do, they are not always aware of the possibilities given by internet; they do not always know how to use their tools to access information.

I asked the young person who was saving money to pay for his training as a technician to give me the internet website of the structure so that I could get information about it on the internet. He asked his brother to go to the capital city where the training organisation is located in order to obtain the information. He then spent a lot of time and money having his brother travelling to Cotonou meanwhile it would have been easier to make a phone call or search on the internet with simple key words.

Young people struggle finding jobs. For educated persons this struggle mainly comes from the bad orientation they may have taken. However, for untrained people it seems to be due to lack of motivation and little access to information.

## 5. Chapter 5: Framing the situation of agrobusinesses

This chapter explores the situation of the businesses and the interactions that are taking place within the organisations. Based on the data that I collected during the fieldwork, I conducted an analysis of the challenges to which businesses are confronted. In the second part, I analyse more in depth the participation of youth. Finally this chapter is concluded by an exploration of the opportunities to intensify the interactions between youth and the agrobusinesses.

### 5.1. Challenges of agrobusinesses

#### 5.1.1. Challenges in term of productivity

On the one hand, the SG cooperative is a small and grassroot business which was created more than twenty years ago by local persons who suspected a good marketing potential in the product they just discovered. On the other hand, the maize transformation company is an industrial enterprise which benefited at its start in 1985 of important investments from a Beninese businessman. Now both businesses produce transformed food products and employ local workers to do operative tasks and to manage the companies.

Both businesses introduce products that can be considered as frugal innovation (Leliveld & Knorringa, 2018; Zanello et al., 2016). The SG cooperative markets a product that is destined to provide access to proteins for poor local people. It is then frugal in the sense that *Goussi* is cheap and more affordable than meat as a source of protein. It is an innovation because of its uniqueness on the Beninese market. The maize transformation company markets flour for human consumption with additives in order to help local population fight vitamin and nutrient deficiencies. This product is innovative in the form that it takes compared to usual maize flour traditionally transformed.

However, both businesses encounter difficulties during the production and marketing of their innovation creating problems of rentability. Issues in terms of supply (as illustrated in the box 3) are related to quality of the raw product and trust relationships with producers and merchants. It affects the productivity of the businesses and quality of the final products.

In terms of marketing, issues are related to the lack of market. Although both businesses are convinced of the benefits and the value of their product, they fail to reach enough consumers to insure the rentability of their activities. Marketing strategies might sometimes be too ambitious and not adapted to the type of consumers they are trying to reach.

**BOX 5. EXAMPLE OF ISSUES AFFECTING THE RENTABILITY OF AGROBUSINESSES:**

- 1- **Supply in raw materials:** Finding good quality raw products is a challenge for Beninese companies. The SG business is often confronted with merchants who mix soy seeds with stones in the bags in order to receive more money for a smaller quantity of product. Hard to detect, this practice causes the SG business to lose money. First, it increases the price of the soy that is being bought. Second it implies that sorting the seeds takes longer, reducing the productivity of the worker and increasing the cost of the activity.

Issues with raw materials of low quality are also frequent for the maize company. Merchants and producers are not always able to store the maize seeds correctly and seeds rot before arriving in the factory. Raw material is then lost. The commercial director of this company mentioned during an interview that this was an issue with producers who do not have the infrastructure or the knowledge to improve the storage of their product before it is being brought to the transformation site.

Contracts are not created anymore between businesses and the producers because agreements are apparently not respected from the part of the producers. The technical manager of the maize company explained to me that it was hard to predict the quality or the quantity that a supplier would be able to deliver, it changes a lot from one year to the other making it hard to formalise.

Improving the quality of the raw seeds arriving in both companies could allow to increase productivity and rentability.

- 2- **Marketing of the final product:** The SG cooperative is well embedded in its local area. The shop at the front of the cooperative compound sells Soy Goussi to regular customers. Some individuals come to buy bags of 50kg of product to retail it. Marketing operation to promote the product take place in markets in several cities in the south of the country but managers still deplore that sales are not high enough. Members of the cooperative complain that their salary is insufficient and managers regret not being able to make investments to improve the production process.

At the maize company, grits sales are contracted but flour and bran sales are very low. Stocks of these products are increasing in the storage units of the company. Flour can only be kept up to six months until the expiry date. Because sales are low, piles of tons of flour are unsold and rot in the storage unit.

Directors of the company explained to me that sales of grits to the national brewery company are increasing, thus increasing the production of co-products of flour and bran. However even if sales of these products might increase it does not go as fast as what is being produced.

Second, the manager of the shop explained that the directors of the company decided in June 2017 to increase the price from 1400 F CFA to 2 000 F CFA per five kilograms of flour. Local customers from around the factory stopped buying the product. Now, even if the price decreased again to 1 250 F CFA, consumers took different habits and do not come anymore to buy it. In order to solve this issue, managers are starting to develop strategies to improve the promotion of the flour in the capital city and other main cities around the country but results are not present yet and workers are worried.

It is possible to highlight other types of issues, like for instance hygiene in the SG cooperative but because the effect on productivity and employment is indirect and more difficult to identify, issues related to supply and marketing will serve as examples for the rest of the demonstration.

These difficulties in both of the businesses demonstrate the need for innovation in various types of activities. Businesses need to find new strategies in order to overcome their problems of supply and marketing. These innovations come from a good knowledge of the market and commercial strategies but also together with reflections and analysis of the situation of the business and potential opportunities in the value chain. Thus, the need for innovation can be fulfilled by educated people with a good knowledge of the value chains (Zanello et al., 2016).

### 5.1.2. Perceived advantages & drawbacks for workers

When asking workers about the positive aspects of their work they all mention the stability of the businesses. In the SG cooperative case, workers are grateful to have to possibility to work in a

place that survived for two decades. The head of logistics mentioned “it’s good that we resisted for twenty-three years!”. The long existence of the business is a sign that it can sustain social changes and overcome problematic situations.

Similarly, in the maize transformation company, the technical director mentioned that the enterprise existed for eighteen years and it was a sign of “good management”. He compared it to a cotton transformation factory nearby, where every two or three years the company had to close for financial reasons and operative workers were fired and needed to look for new jobs. Workers of the maize company felt their job was more secured in this enterprise and perceived it as something positive.

On the other hand, when asking employees of both businesses about the disadvantages of their position and enterprise, they all talked about the “little salary”. In the maize transformation company, an occasional worker explained that the effort and time he puts in his work is not a good reflection of the money he perceives for it. Other workers also expressed frustration of not being rewarded for their work. They explained that they see unsold bags of flour rotting in the storage units meanwhile they would be happy to sometimes receive one for their own consumption as a “gift” from the company.

Small salary is a problem because it does not allow to lift workers out of poverty. It impacts their motivation and productivity and many of them, especially young occasional workers, have to take side jobs to complete their revenue and improve their living conditions.

For permanent workers the advantages they identify about working in these businesses is related to the stability of their employment. In the difficult context of the job market in Benin, it is important because it allows to provide, at least, a basis for a living. However young workers do not have access to this type of stability. Their positions are temporary and they can only access permanent positions if there is a vacancy and if they already worked as occasional workers long enough to show their value to the managers.

### 5.1.3. Communication issues

Overall in both businesses, I observed issues related to communication. In the maize company, workers are frustrated of seeing the piles of flour rotting away meanwhile they are convinced people would buy them if the price was lower (Figure 15). They talk about a gap between the managers’ commercial strategy and what is happening in reality. Many criticisms emerge from operative workers who are scared for the stability of the business because they see bags of flour pilling up in the storage area but do not know if the managers are acting to solve this issue. Employees fail to understand the strategy decided by the directors of the enterprise because they are not informed of the decisions taken by their leaders.

The communication issues mainly rest in the fact that on the one hand, operative workers do not comprehend the strategies of the managers and on the other hand managers do not suspect worries or interest of operative workers about the strategy and future of the company.

Meetings are never organised with operative workers and their leaders in the maize company. This renders difficult the communication between the different hierarchical levels in the enterprise. Operative workers are expected to only come and work every day on the machines but managers are not aware of their fears, questions, opinions and ideas because there is no space organised to exchange about it.



Similarly, in the SG business I had the opportunity to observe that managers were not communicating with each other on many points. For instance, the administrative manager emphasized the importance of improving the marketing meanwhile the treasurer and the secretary saw value in improving the hygiene. They were not aware of each other's opinion before I organised a focus group to discuss about it.

In this focus group, men frequently shifted from speaking Fon to speaking French. The two women who assisted could not understand or speak French but never asked for translations of what was said and men did not translate spontaneously either. Out of fear or perceived duty, women did not dare asking questions or making remarks to men in the SG business. Thus, even if women were involved in the process of communicating and strategy discussions, they could not listen or intervene in the discussions when other actors were talking in French. They only positioned themselves as informants but not as actors of the negotiation.

Internal communication allows to link the different units of a business. It can contribute to improving the performances of a business by motivating the workers, sharing ideas, highlighting issues. Lack of communication creates barriers between groups in an enterprise, impeaching the efficient use personal resources in both businesses (Leeuwis, 2013). It can also stand in the way of developing more innovation or improving the diffusion system (Zanella et al., 2016).

In the two cases of study, lack of communication creates barriers between groups. This phenomenon finds its roots in cultural rules and traditions like patriarchy which is omnipresent in Benin. The social context in which the two businesses are embedded reflects itself in their organisation. The patriarchal society of Benin gives prominence and responsibilities to fathers and men. Little communication and exchange in the daily life and mundane activities is reflected in the organisation of the business where only a few employees have the power to take decisions.

## 5.2. *Inclusion and participation*

### 5.2.1. Hierarchical and patriarchal order

In the urban context in which this research is embedded, major inequalities exist between inhabitants. Access to education depends on family circumstances and financial situation (Dhakal et al., 2018). Most of the time, women are discriminated and their access to resources is complicated because of social norms and patriarchal society (Kinkingninhoun-Médagbé et al., 2010). Youth is under the influence of their family and particularly their father who acts as a representative and leader of the family.

Enterprises are hierarchically organised. The two businesses I have been studying also follow the patriarchal rules. In the SG business men are leading the cooperative and taking decisions, women are operative workers and young girls are occasional workers. In the maize transformation industry, men are also in charge on different hierarchical levels. The team leader at the packaging workshop is a woman but she is only in charge of other women.

In both businesses, young persons are only present as occasional workers, living in precarious situations. They are doing many different tasks and learning them from other occasional or permanent workers.

Graduated persons with university diplomas are higher in the hierarchy than persons who stopped their studies after *collège* or high-school. Those who received a professional training also have the

opportunity to be part of expert teams in the maize transformation company. For instance, the electricians, mechanics and welders are having specific tasks with more responsibilities than simple operative workers in the factory.

In both businesses, I could observe a hierarchy in terms of trainings and diplomas but also in terms of gender and age. Graduated men of a certain age are usually on top of the decision-making pyramid meanwhile young untrained girls are under the supervision of several hierarchical superiors.

The patriarchal society present in Benin is highlighted in these two businesses. Women and youth often belong to the lower hierarchical levels of the businesses. Because of their lower job positions they do not only suffer from precarity but are also dependent on the decisions made by the managers.

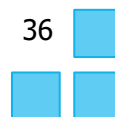
Just like in a patriarchal family where fathers have the responsibility to provide for their family and take decision for other family members; in the two enterprises I visited, the responsibility of managing the enterprise rests on the shoulders of a small group of individuals. Other workers are depending on the good management of the company to keep their position in the enterprise and preserve a source of revenue. For instance, in the maize company, the salary of the workers was not raised in 2017 (contrary to what is usually done) because the revenues of the company were insufficient. This is partly due to the increase of the price of the flour which resulted in a drop of the sales. Here the managers took the decision of increasing the price and it had the unexpected consequence to reduce the sales and impact negatively the revenue of the company and the salary of the workers. Workers depend on the decisions taken by the leaders of the company but are neither invited to take part in them, nor informed about them.

This lack of concertation and inclusion can be perceived as an issue because only the voice of a few individual is represented in the decisions taken, meanwhile the future of all employees is dependent on them. Marginalised groups, like youth interests, are not represented and it impacts negatively their empowerment and well-being (Vossenbergh, 2018).

### 5.2.2. Youth participation in professional activities

As a mirror of the patriarchal society in which the two businesses are embedded, youth is located at the bottom of the pyramid (BoP). The first advantage of youth that is perceived by the workers and managers of the businesses is their physical strength. For this reason, they are recruited as occasional workers to do the physical tasks that do not require any knowledge or qualification. Their participation in manual tasks allows to preserve the physical abilities of other workers.

Businesses are profit oriented, their objective is to be productive enough in order to cover their charges and finance the development of new activities or the improvement of activities already in place. The box below (Box 4) offers a summary of the evaluation of youth participation in the businesses (Appendix D: Pictures of the maize company)



Appendix E: Evaluation of youth participation in professional activities) through the framework proposed by Cahill & Dadvand, (2018).

**BOX 6. EVALUATION OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE SG COOPERATIVE AND THE MAIZE COMPANY WITH THE FRAMEWORK PROPOSED BY CAHILL & DADVAND (2018).**

- ⇒ **Purpose:** Both businesses are profit driven want wish to improve their productivity to insure the prosperity of the organisation
- ⇒ **Positioning:** As a reflection of the Beninese patriarchal society youth is positioned at the BoP
- ⇒ **Perspectives:** Youth perspectives are not included or represented in the businesses
- ⇒ **Power Relations:** Youth is only subjected to the power of hierarchical superiors and does not exercise power on other actors
- ⇒ **Protection:** Youth's position is precarious compared to other workers. Their jobs are temporary, physical and unstable, they do not benefit from social protection.
- ⇒ **Place:** There is no specific place where youth can express their feelings, opinions or need regarding the work in the businesses
- ⇒ **Process:** Processes to include youth are not yet in place but global actions start to be taken to increase participation of all workers

This evaluation concludes that youth is not yet participating in businesses. There is no place made specifically for youth to express themselves, meaning that their perspectives are not included and they are subjected to unilateral power relations.

This can be explained by the purpose of the businesses to increase productivity and make more profit out of their activities. Youth in itself is not perceived as having specific strengths or advantages that could allow to reach these objectives. As Cahill and Dadvand (2018) mention in the first part of the framework, participation of youth cannot be an end in itself, it must be driven by a purpose. In order to improve the inclusion of youth and their participation in the agri-food sector, their advantages and purposes must be aligned to the ones of the businesses.

### 5.2.3. Conclusions on challenges and inclusion

Even if the businesses explored by this study are very different in terms of size, origin, strategy, they both encounter similar challenges. They encounter problems related to production and marketing but issues of inclusion may also, indirectly, impact the potential for innovation and the rentability of these businesses.

Looking at the interactions between the businesses and youth from the perspective of the agrobusinesses allows to highlight several interesting findings. First of all, businesses are encountering diverse challenges which require innovation and change to be tackled. Secondly, inclusion is not achieved. Youth, women are groups under-represented or absent of the management teams. They are not included or consulted in the processes of decision making. Unfortunately, lack of communication between groups and teams creates barriers to creation and diffusion innovation and contributes to exclusion of marginalised groups.

For youth, lack of inclusion, lack of communication can impact their motivation to perform for the company. Indeed, workers deplore the lack of attention they receive from managers. They are frustrated to observe what they perceive as "the failure of the company" and not being able to act to change the situation.

The responsible of the shop at the maize company also mentioned her deception of not being informed more of the decisions taken by the managers of the company. She criticised that the

managers decided to change the price of the flour without taking her advice into consideration even if she has a good knowledge of the product and of the consumers because she observes every day the dynamics in the shop.

These challenges are all linked to each other as insufficient communication creates barriers between working groups, gender and age groups. Lack of motivation is not only damageable for the company but also for youth which loses perspective of its own future.

### 5.3. *Potential opportunities*

#### 5.3.1. Youth and potential change

Opinions on youth are multiple. The treasurer and the head of logistics in the SG cooperative depicted young persons as energetic workers, prone to take decision fast and capable of moving things forward. While their opinion was positive, the technical manager in the maize company used the same arguments to highlight his perceptions of the weaknesses of youth. He stated "Youth acts first and reflect after. Older persons think first and act after." He preferred the wisdom of old persons to take decisions in the factory whereas the two actors of the SG cooperative preferred the pace of young people and their ability to change things.

Opinions on youth depend on the context and the situation of the enterprise. On the first hand, informants from the SG cooperative observed the necessity to change things in the cooperative in order to keep it cost-effective. On the other hand, the technical manager of the maize company did not want to alter the existing order in the company and noticed that youth could present a threat to this order. Youth seem to be associated with the capacity to change, renew pre-existing structures and social orders. Lyocks, Lyocks, & Kagbu, (2013) stated "Youth has the potential to overcome some of the major constraints to expanding agricultural production in the country because they are often more open to new ideas and practices than adult farmers."

This capacity to bring new ideas and methods can be perceived as a threat by managers who are satisfied and comfortable with the current situation of their business; but it can also be perceived as an opportunity for managers who perceive the need to change things in order to improve the productivity of the business.

Before accepting to give youth a chance to participate in a company, a business needs to acknowledge that change could be positive or necessary for the enterprise. When I asked the managers of both businesses what were the current challenges of the company all had action points to tell me. In the cooperative the hygiene, the marketing and the infrastructures were mentioned. In the maize company they told me about the quality of the product and the marketing of flour and bran. If managers the cooperative felt like they were getting to an impasse in terms of management with only few ideas on how to improve their own situation; on the contrary, the maize company directors mentioned the strategies they were developing to face their challenges.

The head of logistics and the treasurer of the cooperative were probably more incline to welcome youth in their team than the technical manager and the directors of the maize company, because they perceived the necessity to bring change to the enterprise. Their interest was thus aligned with the potential capacities of youth to act and create change. The general director of the maize company had a very bad opinion on youth and seemed to be scared of the upheavals young people could provoke in the company.

As mentioned in a previous paragraph, youth and businesses should have shared interests in order for participation to improve (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018). What is demonstrated here is that interests could be aligned when there is a perceived need to achieve change in the business. Thanks to their dynamism and ambition, youth can contribute to the achievement of new projects or new objectives amongst the businesses by bringing new ideas and acting.

### 5.3.2. Opportunities of the agri-food sector

The agri-food sector includes various types of activities and organisations. Each value chain involves a set of coordinated actors that contribute to the final product. Some actors are directly interacting with the product; meanwhile others are having an indirect interaction with it, such as services that support the production, processing or marketing activities (Nutz & Sievers, 2015).

Depending on the type of product, value chains can be more or less complex with different types of actors involved in it. The value chain approach is interesting in the sense that it allows to contextualise the activities of individual organisations and to identify potential opportunities for employment.

By comparing the example of the SG cooperative and the value chain in which it is involved with producers and retailers, it is possible to identify potential gaps in terms of marketing actors and potential services that could support the production and processing activities of this specific value chain. Indeed, the activities are located in a small area, marketing activities are mostly insured by the cooperative itself or informal retailers and not globally organised. As the SG business encounters difficulties selling its product, new actors like services or merchants could potentially be involved in this value chain to develop the SG market. These are opportunities of (self-)employment available for youth.

The African value chains currently involve a lot of informal actors that present interesting economic opportunities but are also characterised by their instability (Njifen, 2014). Organising the agri-food sector and supporting its development is necessary in order to improve productivity. For instance, so far, actors of the value chains fail to identify good commercial partners. The SG cooperative and the maize company fail to build stable relations with producers for the supply of raw material because of quality issues and low trust relationships. Supporting the production through extension services and organising sustainable commercial partnerships would allow to support the development of both producers and transformation businesses. These opportunities for the development of value chains and sustainable agri-food economy are also opportunities for the employment of youth.

Because of the current difficulties, actors of the agri-food value chains encounter and because of the potential margins for their development, the agri-food sector is rich in terms of employment opportunities. There are opportunities within enterprises to change and improve the current organisation and efficiency of the activities. But also, opportunities for business creation as direct actors of the value chain or indirect actors providing services and support to the farm and firms involved in it (Minde et al., 2015; Nutz & Sievers, 2015).

As mentioned in the value chain approach described by Nutz & Sievers, (2015) opportunities exist in the value chains, either in the firms that already exist or as new businesses to be involved in the value chain. Difficulties that businesses encounter are opportunities for youth to take a place in the agri-food sector. Youth is an actor of change (Lyocks et al., 2013). Young individuals have

the capacity and the dynamism to try things and act. The goal is then to match opportunities of the agri-food sector with advantages of youth. Youth is not yet aware of the potentialities of the agri-food sector and managers are not yet convinced of the advantages of increasing youth participation.

### 5.3.3. Creating and seizing opportunities

Although not every business is ready to utterly evolve and to create space for young people because they are not aware of the advantages it could show; some businesses are taking actions to facilitate interactions and communication between employees, for example, the maize company which plans to organise more frequent meetings with its employees.

Youth must step in in order to show their value to managers that are not convinced of it yet. Challenges of the company highlight the weaknesses in terms of the managers' strategy. In the discussions I had with workers I observed that they had a lot of suggestions to make in order to solve the issues. For example, the salesperson at the maize company suggested to lower the price of the flour and to start promotion campaigns in the city to promote the product. By expressing their ideas, it can give new insights to managers to create new strategies (Minde et al., 2015).

As Zanella et al., (2016) argue, innovation is a collective process that requires diversified human resources. Innovating to face the challenges of agrobusinesses requires the participation of all those who can bring ideas and solutions. Focussing the participation of youth on the challenges of the businesses could help them realise that threats of one are opportunities for the other. For instance, youth's need to access jobs is an opportunity for businesses to get cheap and efficient working force. On the other hand, businesses issues related to supply and marketing are opportunities for youth to take initiatives in the companies of the agri-food sector.

Referring to the second myth about youth participation mentioned in the paper by O'Donoghue et al., (2002:21) more inclusiveness would not necessarily mean that adults and managers would lose their power of taking decisions. These realisations could be initiated by the top of the hierarchical pyramid but also by the bottom of the pyramid by making clear demands on communication and participation.

So far, interactions between businesses and youth are mainly unilateral. Leaders of the enterprise and team leaders are demanding efforts to young workers but youth encounters barriers when trying to reach the top of the pyramid. Patriarchal order, insufficient internal communication impeach youth from taking actions. Fortunately, opportunities to create spaces of exchange start appearing in both enterprises with the intentions of having more inclusive and frequent meetings.

These opportunities need to be seized in order to reveal the potential of youth in contributing positively to business development (Dhakal et al., 2018; Lyocks et al., 2013). The following chapter will analyse the characteristics and attitudes of youth regarding employment in the agri-food sector.



## 6. Chapter 6: Youth ambitions for a better future

### 6.1. Youth perceptions of the agri-food sector

#### 6.1.1. Little interest for the agri-food sector

Baba-Moussa (2017) argues there are mismatches between the domains youth chooses to study and the hiring sectors. For instance, only 1,84% of the student study agronomy meanwhile about 50% of the Beninese population works in agriculture. Furthermore, Gbetoenonmon (2013) argues that policies and regulations in Benin, are not adapted to the situation of the country and do not allow the transformation of its economy. "The most important is to include youth into the national job market by improving the matching process between demands and offer in terms of working force."<sup>3</sup> (Gbetoenonmon, 2013). This literature illustrates that although youth do not seem interested in agri-food sector authors are convinced it presents opportunities for employment and socio-economic development.

In the urban areas in which I conducted my investigation, youth is not informed about the agri-food value chains. From the young people I had the opportunity to discuss with during my fieldwork, only one had the ambition to keep working in the sector of the agroindustry. He actually discovered the factory work during a previous employment, enjoyed the contact with machines and technology and now saves money to pay himself a training as a technician in electricity and industrial maintenance.

Other workers mainly decided to work for these agrobusinesses because they had the opportunity to take a position there; but not necessarily because they were searching in this sector. An occasional worker of the maize company mentioned she passed by the company one day, decided to stop to ask if there was a potential available position and took the opportunity of working there because it allowed her to earn money to eat. The industrial sector in Benin presents the opportunity to recruit unqualified and inexperienced workers for operative positions. For instance, the SG cooperative and the maize company recruit inexperienced and unqualified workers for occasional positions. This type of position is very suitable for young persons who did not achieve a higher education but it is very unstable.

Managers of the company achieved higher education diplomas but sometimes in very different domains than agricultural and agroindustry sciences. For instance, the administrative and financial manager of the maize processing site aspired to be a private expert accountant. He studied accounting and now uses his knowledge and skills to manage the production site of the maize company.

Although youth has very unequal access to opportunities in the agri-food sector, neither educated, nor uneducated youth seems to seek careers in the agri-food sector (Kruijssen, 2009). Authors argue that this disinterest might be due to policies (Gbetoenonmon, 2013) or lack of awareness (Haggblade et al., 2015; Kruijssen, 2009). Traditional views on agriculture and agro-industrial factories are about physical and repetitive tasks and contribute to the negative image of work in

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<sup>3</sup> Translated from French

these domains (Fox & Thomas, 2016). There is a lack of awareness about services that support these activities and it explains why youth is not interested by the agri-food sector and why the activities in the sector lack productivity and innovation (Kruijssen, 2009; Lyocks et al., 2013).

### 6.1.2. Lack of dynamism in the agri-food sector

As demonstrated previously, the interactions between youth and the agri-food sector are mostly happening through operative jobs like in the maize transformation company and the SG cooperative. Students prefer other domains than the agri-food sector. Very often they are not aware of the dynamics and the opportunities of this area (Haggblade et al., 2015). One of the issues is that it inhibits the dynamism in the sector. Possibilities of developing job opportunities, improving the system are not communicated. Educated youth does not notice the potential of agri-food chains and uneducated youth who find themselves involved in operative positions in this sector loses hope and motivation to find interesting job positions (Kruijssen, 2009).

I perceived many of the young people which are currently working at the maize industry as hopeless and passive, as if they could not have an impact on their own future. I interviewed a girl of 21 years old who was employed as an occasional worker at the packaging workshop, she stated that she took this position in order to earn money. She did not express any particular interest in the agroindustry and told me she took this position because it was the only one available. She explained that her priority was to get a permanent job in order to reach stability and start a family.

This lack of awareness about the professional opportunities in the agri-food sector is damageable for both youth and the country's economy. Indeed, about half of the Beninese population is currently working in the agricultural sector (Haggblade et al., 2015). But productivity of agriculture is very low and farmers struggle to make a living out of their activities. Similarly, in the agroindustry, workers feel like they are underpaid and cannot live comfortably with the salary they earn (Gbetoenonmon, 2013). Innovations in this sector should contribute to improving the production and marketing performances of the businesses but also the situation of workers in this sector (Dramé-Yayé et al., 2011).

Increasing the involvement of youth in studies related to agri-food systems goes through improving the image and the visibility of professional opportunities in this sector. Doing this would allow, not only to have educated persons to increase innovation in the sector (Zanello et al., 2016) but also to develop new activities and job opportunities for youth. Authors like Haggblade et al., (2015), Koyana & Mason, (2017) and Lyocks, Lyocks, & Kagbu, (2013) argue that activities within the agri-food sector and small businesses led by local actors present the best opportunities to develop and empower local communities.

Some authors mention the need to reform education in this sense and to improve the pertinence of higher studies to match the needs of the economic market (Baba-Moussa, 2017; Dramé-Yayé et al., 2011). The lack of dynamism of the agri-food sector impeach to not attract a working that is ambitious, dynamic and knowledgeable. Besides, because of this, the sector fails to develop itself and to become more dynamic. This vicious circle must be broken by intensifying communication and raising awareness on the realities and the potentialities of the sector.

## 6.2. Youth mindsets at work

### 6.2.1. Motivation and work

Because of the economic and social situation of Benin, youth benefits from very unequal access to education and later employment. While the children who grew up in rich families might have the opportunity to choose their own vocation, some others are obliged to work early and in specific domains. Thus, motivation of youth in its work is very diverse. While some persons selected their job out of interest and ambition, some only hope to bring money back to their family to make a living (Kruijssen, 2009).

Youth that I met is demanding jobs with less physical and repetitive activities than in factories. Some persons wish to work in offices or to have more diversified activities than what is possible as an operative worker in an industry. From the experience of their parents or other family members, they usually observed that working in factory is tiring and only offers little opportunities of evolution. It makes youth wish for other types of professional activities. However, because of the crisis on the job market, youth, especially those who couldn't follow a higher education, are forced to take jobs that do not fit their aspirations.

Once involved in the food industries youth encounters difficulties evolving in terms of professional activities. Victims of the lack of inclusion and participation, they find themselves forced to follow certain directions given by leaders of the businesses. These obligations and restrictions and this lack of agency are affecting their performance.

Motivation of youth affects their work and its quality. The technical manager of the maize company introduced me to the two persons he perceived as the current best occasional workers in the company because of the dedication they gave to their work and the quality that came out of it. After interviewing these young workers, I understood that these two persons had clear ambitions and sharp objectives. They were coming to work every day and dedicating themselves to the tasks not only because they wanted to earn money but because they wanted to use this money to pay for a training and to insure a good education to their children.

Other occasional workers with whom I had the opportunity to exchange seemed hopeless and passive compared to them and not motivated. I understood it was because they were not driven by any other purpose than earning money to assume their daily needs.

Motivation of youth was perceived in their work. The technical manager expressed much more satisfaction with the work of ambitious young persons because they were driven by purpose that forced them to give the best of themselves at work. They had hope that they would reach their goal and it motivated them in their tasks. Because of the situation of the job market and sometimes because of family circumstances, young persons are forced into certain jobs and hopeless to find better positions. This affects their motivation and the quality of their work.

As the example of the two 'best workers' is demonstrating, motivation can be external. They had ambitions outside of the company that could be fulfilled if they gave their best at work. But motivation should also be enhanced within the companies. Considering that the quality of the work is affected by the motivation of the worker, motivation should be given by the managers to the employees. As a matter of fact, since workers are not always choosing to work in a factory but are often forced into certain positions, they should receive some goals and gratifications in order to enhance their motivation.

Lack of motivation of youth is an issue because it impacts negatively their abilities. In their professional activities it keeps them from giving their best and being productive at work, but it also affects their willingness to look for better job opportunities. Insufficient motivation is related to the lack of objectives and hope in a better future (Kruijssen, 2009). It is a barrier that youth poses itself to access information and opportunities. Absence of goals divests youth from the energy to look for new prospects.

Furthermore, lack of motivation of youth results in a negative perception of the group by other individuals.

### 6.2.2. Perceptions of youth

Opinions about youth can be very diverse. The director of the maize company had a very bad opinion of youth because of bad experiences with some individuals. He believes youth nowadays “only cares about money”. When he used to hire young people, he explained that “in the beginning it was going well, they were enthusiastic during the trial period but as soon as they were offered the job they stopped making efforts.”. Furthermore, he mentioned that “young people are distracted, they cannot focus properly and this is a problem”. Finally, he said that he would always favour older persons with experience than youth even if they are enthusiastic because of these issues of concentration and motivation.

The administrative and financial manager of the grits production site had milder opinions. Maybe because he was relatively young himself, he explained that he did not notice differences between the work of young and old people in administrative tasks. He believes that youth should be given more chances of taking part in management of businesses because they are as capable of succeeding as experienced persons. He believes that the lack of experience of young persons can be compensated by their dynamism and ambition.

Finally, some persons have very good opinions of youth. The technical manager of the maize company mentioned he would always favour young persons to older ones because they are more physically able to do the jobs. He highlighted their advantages in terms of health and physical strength but also their efficiency. The managers of the cooperative appreciated the flexibility, the new ideas and the energy of young motivated persons.

Perceptions are very much influenced by the experience of adults with young people. When someone meets a young person, who is ambitious he or she might notice their strength and motivation. Nevertheless, those who meet with passive young individuals who have no specific objective can be struck by their lack of enthusiasm and capabilities. Indeed, when someone is ambitious, driven by a goal, they will put more effort and dynamism into their activities thus also showing a better image of themselves. In order for youth to empower themselves, they need to be driven by a purpose, they need to find hope in a better future.

Providing youth with hope will have a positive effect on their motivation and will improve their perception by older persons. Probably adults will then be more prone to give them responsibility and voice to express themselves in both businesses and the society.

### 6.2.3. Youth and work

All the findings previously mentioned are related. Youth positioned at the bottom of the pyramid impacts their capacity to empower themselves and to access information (5.2.). Lack of information and awareness about the agri-food sector creates a barrier to the development of new

ambitions to start a career in this sector (6.1.). Lack of ambitions and goals negatively affects the motivation of youth for work. It also negatively impacts the quality of their work and thus their perception by other groups (6.2.). On the figure below (Figure 6), elements attributed to youth are in red. Elements attributed to the business actors are in blue.

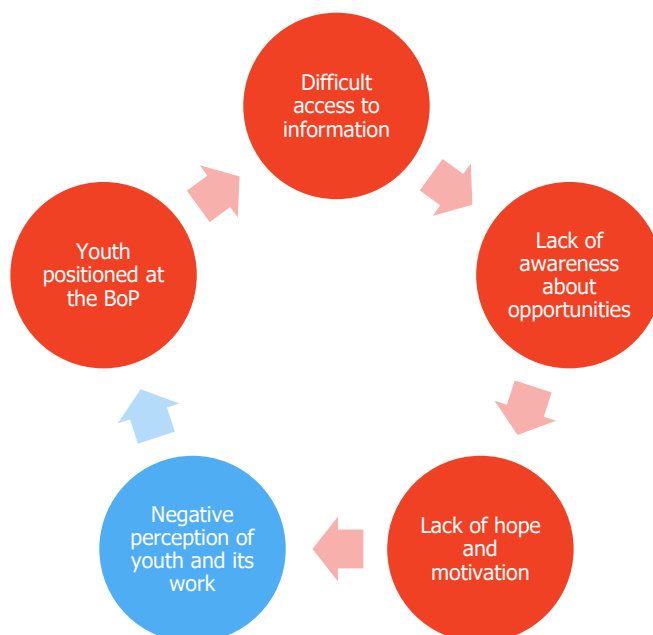


FIGURE 6: NEGATIVE CIRCLE OF YOUTH RELATIONSHIP WITH WORK

Both youth and agrobusinesses are currently suffering from the barriers created by an insufficient participation of youth. For businesses it results in an insufficient use of human resources and an inability to face challenges related for instance to issues of supply and marketing (5.3.). For youth the consequence is a difficult employment and a general lack of motivation (6.2.). Barriers like patriarchy, insufficient communication, inefficient diffusion of information stand in the way of transforming these issues in opportunities for both youth and the businesses.

In order to be motivated and productive in their professional activities, youth must be driven by a goal. This goal can be set by external factors but it can also be made up internally in the business. Cahill and Dadvand (2018) mentioned in their framework that the participation of youth should be motivated by a purpose: having youth working on solving the challenges to which agrobusinesses are currently confronted can be a sufficient goal to motivate the participation of youth.

In order to match youth with potential opportunities in the agri-food value chains, it is necessary to first raise awareness about the situation and then to link interested youth to the opportunities of the sector (Dramé-Yayé et al., 2011; Kruijssen, 2009). The next section develops some arguments on youth capacity building situation.

## 6.3. *Connecting youth and opportunities*

### 6.3.1. Social circles

The young persons I had the opportunity to meet in the two agrobusinesses mostly worked there in order to earn money. Some of them had very specific projects for themselves or their children, others were just asked by their family to contribute to the financial incomes. Youth in Benin spends a lot of time trying to earn money. Poverty, unemployment and underemployment are important

issues in the country. Youth is particularly affected (Baba-Moussa, 2017). Because of their low salaries and the lack of employment security as occasional workers, youth tries to diversify their economic activities by taking side jobs. A young occasional worker at the maize company mentioned she sells snacks on the side of the road after work. Another one teaches lessons to young children, one sells flowers... In order to earn a living for themselves and their family, youth takes on several job positions.

None of the young workers I interviewed in the businesses mentioned having hobbies or personal interests in their free time. Some explained they used their free time to clean their homes. Others told me about going to church or helping one of their family members but neither of them had specific passions or activities to perform in their free time. When I asked if they sometimes met with friends of their age, they were positive but did not elaborate on specific activities. Life of young persons in Benin implies certain duties towards their family and eventually their religious community. Those who had to drop out of school early seem to lack time to have social gatherings with their friends outside of the professional or family circle because of their time consuming and insufficiently remunerating job activities.

Youth perceptions and ideas are shaped by their social surroundings. Because of their intense commitment to their communities and to paid activities, they mostly interact with members of their family or colleagues at work. They do not have much opportunity to open themselves to interact with different social spheres. In the agrobusinesses they are interacting with other occasional workers but do not have the possibility to exchange with other groups. This limited environment restrains the possibilities of opening themselves to new opportunities and new ideas. Staying in a close circle of colleagues, friends and family of the same social environment involves the creation of fictive barriers with other social spheres. It limits communication and restrains the access to potential opportunities.

In agrobusinesses vacancies are often filled with acquaintances of managers or current employees. Indeed, due to the slow development of new technologies like internet, candidates learn about vacancies through their real-life social network. Besides, employers also favour this recruitment technique because it gives them a feeling of trust.

When the recruitment has to be done externally to the businesses, managers try to employ persons they already know. For instance, in the SG company, the treasurer and the head of logistics were both business acquaintances. The administrative and financial manager of the maize production site was recruited because he knew the director and learned about the vacancy via him. Recruitment is mostly happening through personal connections and networks.

Although social networks of young persons are limited due to their economic activities, to their lack of free time, to the lack of access to information, to the lack of empowerment within businesses; social connections are crucial to the professional success of someone in Benin. Social circles allow access to opportunities, knowledge and contributes to open-mindedness. Increasing youth interactions with various persons from different backgrounds would allow to open new opportunities and bring new aspirations.

By extending the network of young persons, they would have the opportunity to reach more employment opportunities, more information but also to get in touch with role models. During my time in Benin I met outside of the businesses, a young girl who started a few years ago her own garden with little knowledge in agronomy. Now her business is profitable and she is developing a





project to teach cultivation methods and to inspire young persons to start a career in agriculture. She is herself an inspiration for other young persons, an example of success in the agri-food sector in Benin.

Within the agrobusinesses youth is so far restricted to operative activities and disempowered. It impeaches their motivation and obstructs their vision of potential opportunities in the sector. Extending their social networks is essential to inspire young people, motivate them and put them in relation with potential opportunities.

### 6.3.2. Capacity building

Youth often lacks skills to fulfil certain job positions. Some of my informants, like for instance the technical manager of the maize company, mentioned that one weakness of youth is their lack of experience. Combined with a lack of education, lack of experience is a disadvantage for youth especially in technical and practical job positions.

Minde et al., (2015) argued that "Agricultural jobs, in general, require less education than the post-farm segments of the agri-food system, such as food processing, packaging and distribution.". However, they require some knowledge of the techniques and skills to cultivate crops or breed animals. In order to empower youth and give them access to job positions in the agri-food value chains, they should acquire appropriate skills and experience.

This can be provided by vocational trainings. Several initiatives already target the skills of youth to reinforce their capacities and their ability to access jobs on the market (Kruijssen, 2009). However, these vocational trainings oriented on the skills of the individual will not be sufficient to tackle the lack of interest for the agri-food sector and lack of motivation to undertake certain activities. Youth people must also be stimulated by the career path they choose.

Empowerment does not only imply to have skilful individuals but they should also be motivated by the career path they are choosing or sometimes pushed in. This personal development can be facilitated thanks to spaces of expression and exposure to inspiring stories (Haggblade et al., 2015).

The young actors of the agrobusinesses that I visited were involved in many different economic activities. They do not have the time or the opportunities to express themselves or engage with someone on a critical reflection about their ambitions for the future. This is a barrier to their motivation and a barrier to the development of their career path.

Even though it is important, capacity building and trainings for youth should not only be about practical skills. It should include spaces for personal development and activities to expand and strengthen their social network (6.3.1.).

## 7. Chapter 7: Coping strategies and societal change

This chapter gathers the evidence analysed in the two preceding chapters based on the data collected in the agrobusinesses and develops recommendations to intensify the interactions between youth and the businesses. These recommendations are meant to cope with the situation of youth in the businesses in order to improve youth employment and productivity of the agri-food sector.

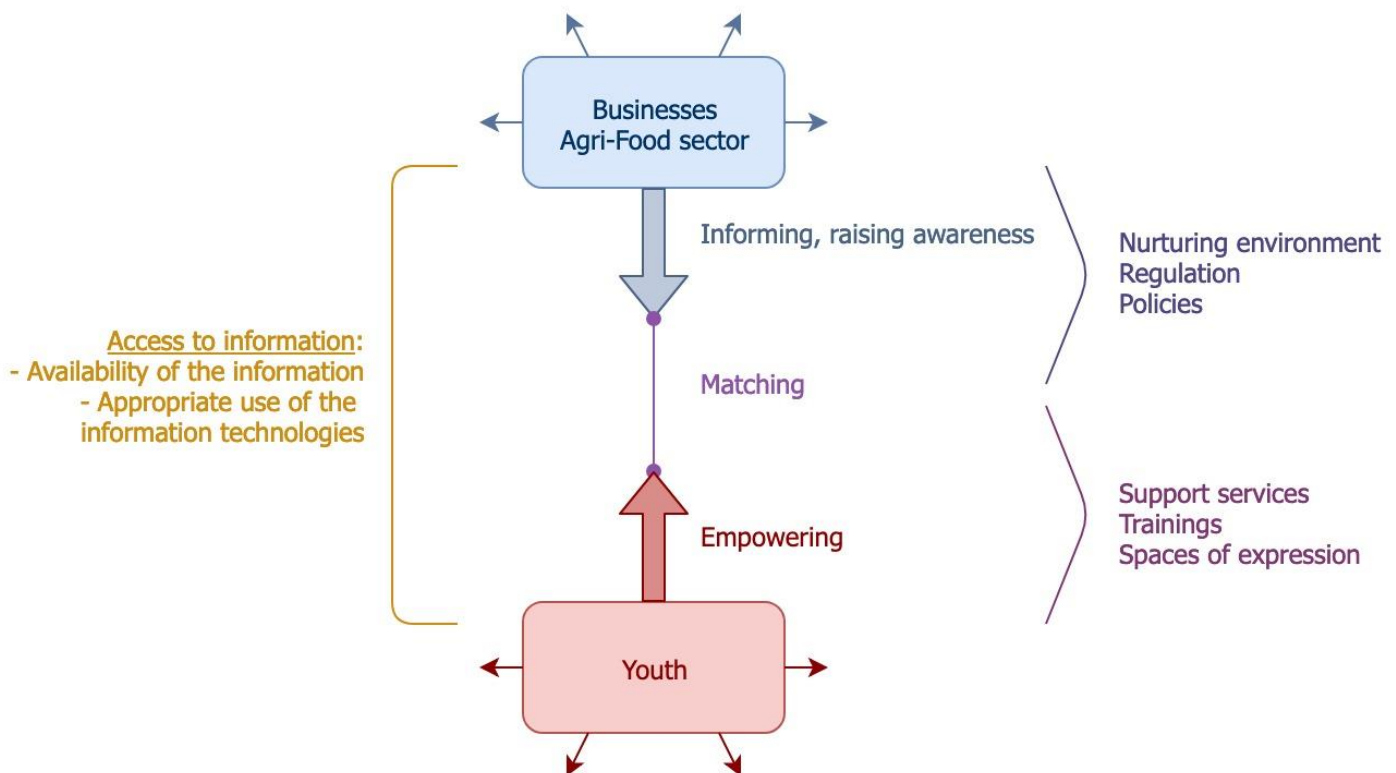


FIGURE 7: MODEL DESCRIBING POTENTIAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN YOUTH AND THE AGROBUSINESSES

The figure above (Figure 7) illustrates the potential relationship between youth and businesses of the agri-food sector. It describes the processes and actions that should be undertaken to intensify the interactions between youth and the businesses. The present chapter is based on this model and details and demonstrates the different elements presented here.

The elements of the model in blue refer to the processes attributed to the businesses. The elements in red refers to youth and the recommendations that come out of the findings presented in chapter 6. Elements in purple are the direct links between youth and the businesses. There is a gradient in the purple colour depending if the element relates more to youth or to the businesses. Finally, elements in yellow on the left side of the model are interfering with all the other elements of the model and refer to concrete measure that would facilitate the process illustrated in the model.

## 7.1. Youth interactions with agrobusinesses

This section focusses on the core of the model and the direct interactions between youth and businesses (Figure 8).

### 7.1.1. Raising awareness on the agri-food sector

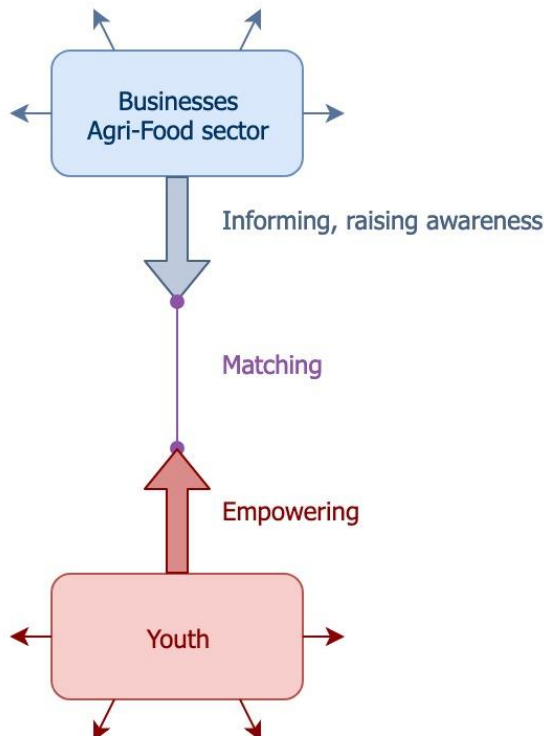


FIGURE 8: CORE OF THE MODEL, INTERACTIONS BETWEEN YOUTH AND THE BUSINESSES

In the previous chapter (6.1.) I highlighted the lack of interest of youth for the agri-food sector. I will now argue that it is important to raise awareness on the economic opportunities of the agri-food sector in West Africa, within actors of the value chains but also as part of the services that are sustaining the value chains, or in the creation of new businesses. Not only youth has to be informed of the economic opportunities offered by the sector; the public in general should become aware of the importance of this domain too (Dramé-Yayé et al., 2011). Diffusion of information on the opportunities of the sector is essential to its development.

Agriculture and agroindustry are key sectors of the economic development of Benin because they are currently underproductive and disorganised. At the moment, the country is also importing more products than exporting, thus having an unbalanced economy meanwhile resources are not used to their full capacity. Productivity of agriculture could largely be improved and the government is planning reforms in order to make it a priority (Baye, 2018).

However, these implications are not yet understood by the population in Benin. My findings along with the literature show that knowledge and interests of the Beninese population about agri-food value chains is limited (6.1.1.; Fox & Thomas, 2016). Efforts are not yet made to improve agriculture and agroindustries. The potential for development is not yet perceived and that is why it should be explained to the local population so they can focus their efforts on a sector that presents good economic opportunities. Providing youth and the wider public with an explanation of the sector might allow entrepreneurial mindsets to spot the opportunities for business development. Similarly, by perceiving the wider context in which their business is embedded, employees might have new ideas of activities and interactions that could be profitable to their enterprise (IFAD, 2014).

As Zanello et al. (2016) argue, collective efforts are necessary to the creation and the diffusion of information. Thus, it is necessary to combine the efforts of all potential actors, including youth and that is why communication needs to be done to recruit work force and produce these efforts.

Raising awareness about the strengths and advantages of the agri-food sector in terms of employment and possibilities for development is also about explaining the diversity of activities and potential employment opportunities. Very often individuals in Benin are only aware of what is happening around them in a close spatial or social proximity.

Increasing communication and raising interests on the economic opportunities of the agri-food sector would create an intensification of the efforts to improve innovation and productivity in agriculture. Authors like Baye (2018) argue that it would have a positive effect on the economy on top of improving youth employment. Like it is illustrated in the model, informing and creating awareness on the sector is a way of bringing the opportunities closer to youth.

### 7.1.2. Empowering youth

Authors mention that the agri-food sector presents promising opportunities for development in Africa (Haggblade et al., 2015). However, youth is not attracted to this sector. Many of the young people working in the agrobusinesses I visited and with whom I had the opportunity to meet are only there by obligation. In need of revenue for themselves or for their family, they end up in this sector because it presents the opportunity to hire young and unexperienced working force.

But working in these industries rarely fulfil the hopes and expectations of young persons (6.2.1.). Lacking perspectives of improving their future, in a position of inferiority compared to their hierarchical superiors and older people, they see themselves stuck in an unpleasant job which furthermore is often unstable and precarious.

Only a small number of young individuals were driven by the purpose of offering to themselves or to their children a better life. The rest of the young workers felt blocked in a vicious circle of poverty and precarity that seemed to them impossible to end. The lack of hope and motivation affects the quality of their work and the image they send to other groups of people. Because of this, old persons, managers and directors sometimes felt like youth is not motivated thus not good at their jobs (6.2.2.).

As Kruijssen (2009) discusses, I argue that creating interest for the agri-food sector and empowering youth who is already involved in it by force, is a key to developing the country. Research showed that the agri-food sector presents interesting development opportunities. However, because of a mismatch between public policies in terms of education and needs of the industry, youth does not aspire to work in the agri-food sector (Dramé-Yayé et al., 2011).

Showing to youth that they have the possibility to change things and act for their future is important for their motivation (Barlet et al., 2016). Too often young people feel restraints by their duty towards their peers to search for possibilities of improving their future. Their social position at the bottom of the pyramid forces youth into predefined directions (4.3.2.). They do not have the opportunity to follow an education or receive a training (4.3.3.). They do not have access to information about the agri-food sector (6.1.1.). They do not have the opportunity to express themselves and share their feeling in a way that would be constructive and useful to their personal development (6.3.2.). It keeps them from discovering and seizing new opportunities because they do not have access to information outside of their close environment (6.3.1.).

Youth has the power to change things even if it might scare business managers. Youth natural dynamism and energy can alter the established order of a business or a society (Lyocks et al., 2013). Because those at the top of the pyramid want to keep their current power and responsibilities, it scares them to give youth the opportunity to change things.

Making youth aware of their own strengths and potential would contribute to raising their hope in a better future. Currently, youth that is involved in the two businesses is unaware of its strengths and advantages. During my exchanges with them I realised that young people lack confidence in

themselves. Because they are reduced to a position at the BoP, they are unable to empower themselves. That is why it is important to demonstrate to them their strengths in terms of innovation and change. This might change the established social order but it would certainly improve their performances in terms of work and have a positive impact on development.

### 7.1.3. Matching youth's capacity for change and business's need for change

In Benin, power relations are very unequal, mostly because of the patriarchal order. I demonstrated that youth is at the bottom of the pyramid and not very involved in decision making processes (5.2.1.). Despite their capacities to achieve change, youth's agency and place in the society is very limited (4.3.2.).

During the analysis of my data, I discovered opportunities to match youth and businesses which are based on the need of businesses to overcome some challenges and on the capacity of youth to achieve change.

In order to improve youth's inclusion and participation in work organisations, other actors need to accept to be confronted with different opinions. Adults need to embrace the dynamism of youth and their potential to achieve change. Inviting a new group to participate in business activities means that new ideas and new visions are likely to emerge in the discussions. It is positive for innovation (Zanello et al., 2016).

Other groups, are not yet necessarily ready to this new participation and the changes it might implies in the businesses or the society (O'Donoghue et al., 2002). Lyocks et al., (2013) argues that youth has a certain ability to innovate and upset predefined social orders. Not only managers and directors should be willing to give a more important place to youth, but they should also welcome their opinions and ideas. This requires preparation so that new dynamics turn out to be productive and do not result in new sources of tension (O'Donoghue et al., 2002).

Managers and directors; the current top of the pyramid need to perceive an added value in welcoming youth into their teams. Otherwise the inclusion of youth could result in having worse results than if nothing had happened. Increasing the participation of youth should be done for a certain purpose. Just like Cahill and Dadvand (2018) mention in their framework, youth participation cannot be an end in itself, but it needs to serve a new purpose. Otherwise the risk is that participation will create new tensions and be counter-productive. This common purpose is a way of matching youth and businesses. As an example from the field, the purpose could be the development of new activities allowing to solve the issues of supply in the maize company. A young person's task could be dedicated to the creation a contract with producers or farmer's organisations to insure the quality of the supply.

Transforming businesses to face challenges and increase participation is a process that takes time. All actors, from youth to the top of the pyramid need to be aware of the implications and need to embrace the same ambition of change.

## 7.2. Facilitating youth empowerment to match with the employment opportunities

This section concerns the activities and the services that should be offered to youth in order to facilitate their empowerment. They relate to youth's capacity to build appropriate knowledge and skills for opportunities of the agri-food sector. Moreover, they also concern youth personal development and career path.

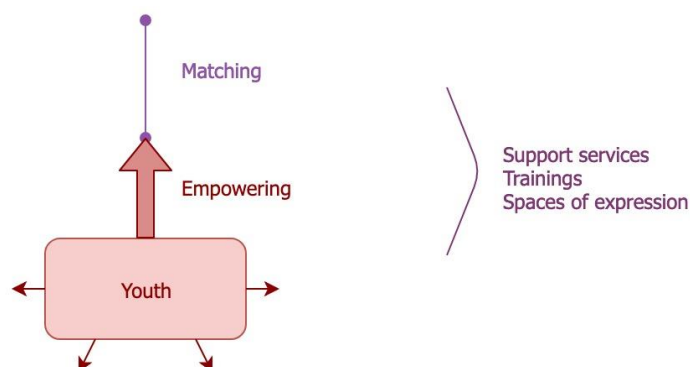


FIGURE 9: PROCESSES FACILITATING YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

### 7.2.1. Connecting youth

The small personal networks to which youth have access are insufficient to make them aware of the professional opportunities in different sectors (6.3.1.). The lack of access to information is a barrier to empowerment. Furthermore, youth is subjected to the expectations of their family and especially their father in terms of work and provision of revenue (4.3.). Both in businesses and in their families, youth only has access to narrow spaces to express their concerns and ambitions. This lack of place in the society affects their personal development and wellbeing. More than just keeping them from accessing interesting job opportunities, the narrow social circles in which they are embedded is not sufficient to allow them to flourish (Dhakal et al., 2018).

Connecting youth, creating spaces of exchanges between persons of similar ages and situations might be a way to improve their wellbeing and perspectives in the future. Since many young people have to drop out of school early in order to help their families, and because they get caught in time consuming professional activities they often lack opportunities to spend time with persons of the same age while it is important for their personal development. It is a barrier to their development and empowerment (Dhakal et al., 2018). My informants in the maize company mentioned they spend a considerable amount of time earning money and then helping their families with their daily tasks.

My findings suggest that because youth lacks self-confidence and opportunities to exchange with people of the same age, having spaces where communication between young persons is facilitated would be a safe environment for them to express their fears, ambitions or daily problems and thus to gain (6.3.2.). It would create opportunities for youth to share their experiences but also to be exposed to the experiences of their peers and be able to learn or be inspired by it. It would be an opportunity for them to expand their social circle and to access a larger amount of information (Kruijssen, 2009).

The social order in Benin does not provide youth with opportunities to take their own space. They have to conform to the expectations of adults who have the experience of life and “know what is best” (Dhakal et al., 2018). Spaces of exchange by youth, and for youth, could be a way to break this tradition. Ideally, these areas would also gather information on education, trainings and job opportunities. It could be a place where youth could share feelings but also brainstorm on how innovate and achieve their idealistic future. A place where businesses could also diffuse information and ask for ideas of innovation. Because the intellectual and cognitive abilities of young people



are too often neglected, this space could fill the gap between youth needs of expression and business innovation.

Intellectual thoughts from youth on work and society would inform innovation and help their development. As businesses face challenges just like the maize company and the SG cooperative need to improve the marketing of their product, they could find ideas of solutions in the outcomes of the exchanges and reflections of young persons.

Young Africans lack contact with their peers and it restrains their empowerment as well as the development of the society. Nevertheless, creating this type of area poses questions such as “How make them attractive to young people? How to make them inclusive? How to make them accessible to busy persons?” (Martey, Etwire, Wiredu, & Dogbe, 2014)

### 7.2.2. Targeting skills and knowledge of youth

Breaking the stereotypes about traditional agriculture and agri-food value chains in general, sensitising to the prominence of agriculture in the African and worldwide society are actions to be done at the youngest age (IFAD, 2014). Awareness must arise as early as possible to raise youth's interests and motivation for work in the agri-food. Primary education programs should include explanations about agriculture and the role that youth will take in order to improve it and develop the country. Access to education being difficult and unequal, sensitisation in primary school is a way of reaching out to the most important part of the youth population (Minde et al., 2015).

Explanations on value chains, agri-food systems and the type of professional activities possible to undertake in this domain would help young individual orient themselves. I exchanged with young persons who started studying a certain domain like for example biology at university and then giving up on it because it did not give sufficient access to employment. Afterwards they directed themselves to positions in the agri-food value chains but this late realisation ended up wasting their time and money.

More than raising interests and aspirations, targeting youth at the youngest age would allow to make a more efficient use of human resources. With a good knowledge of the sector, interested people would be able to accumulate sufficient skills and knowledge already at a young age to access the jobs they aspire to. Considering the expected development of the agri-food systems, providing youth at the earliest age with knowledge and skills relative this sector will increase their chances of employment later. Moreover, orientation could take place as early as possible, either after *collège*, high school or university in order to gain skills, knowledge and experience fast and contribute efficiently to the development of the enterprise and the sector (IFAD, 2014; Minde et al., 2015).

Agrobusinesses and actors of the agri-food sector in general should play an active role in this sensitisation campaigns. It is their ask to demonstrate the value of the sector in order to be able to recruit the most valuable human resources. Raising awareness of youth and the public about the reality and the potential of the agri-food sector provides advantages to the enterprises involved in it because they can benefit from more adapted human resources and more efforts to produce innovation. It is up to them to make the agri-food sector a flagship and cutting-edge domain (Dramé-Yayé et al., 2011; Minde et al., 2015).

Efforts should also be made in terms of policies to enhance these practices and demonstrate the need to develop skills and knowledge that are useful for actors of the agri-food value chains. It is

important to frame and support the activities that are related to the promotion of agri-food value chains and youth participation. Regulations and policies give framing and legitimacy to the actions that might be taken to promote the sector (Kruijssen, 2009).

### 7.2.3. Empowering through practical training

Youth involvement also impacts their personal development and evolution. Dhakal et al., (2018) demonstrated that youth unemployment and lack of participation in social activities affected their ability to access jobs in the later stages of their life. Because youth is responsible for the future of the society and the future of the company, it is important that they participate, with the possibility to observe and question what is being done in businesses. Gaining information on the context in which they are evolving and the strategies adopted by the businesses could facilitate their comprehension of the dynamics in this professional sector.

This process goes through education. Because not everybody has the possibility to receive an education and to choose their own vocation, practical and entrepreneurial trainings could offer interesting opportunities of information. Because higher education in Benin does not match the requirements of the job market, practical and oriented training could be a solution for youth education (Koyana & Mason, 2017). Training through experiences in industries and enterprises of the agri-food sector could be a valuable opportunity for youth to gain experience (Minde et al., 2015). However, this implies that businesses must take time and resources to supervise the young person. It involves trust from the businesses towards youth and motivation from the trainees. So far, even if businesses are used to having interns coming into the company they do not seem ready to spend more time and resources on the education of young persons. In order to take this path businesses would have to perceive a strategic advantage.

Informants in the agrobusinesses explained that practical trainings were currently more valued on the job market than bachelor degrees. Young persons who have the possibility to pursue studies often decide for intellectual fields. However, hiring sectors need technicians and engineers with practical expertise. In the current situation in Benin, young persons are more likely to find easily a job with a training as a technician than with a bachelor in an intellectual domain. Increasing and improving the possibilities to train young persons would give them a better chance at finding a job (Koyana & Mason, 2017). Creating links between enterprises and youth, increasing interactions, would have a positive impact on the motivation of youth to work in a certain sector and on the chances to find job opportunities (Minde et al., 2015).

Because industries are needing technicians with a good physical condition and a strong motivation, they should facilitate the participation of youth through training periods and internships showing them the possibilities offered by the sector and its potential for change. Agrobusinesses like the two I visited require new actors knowledgeable and dynamic enough to achieve a productive change. Because the current educative system does not fit their requirement, the key to involving more youth in the agri-food sector and bringing change is to promote trainings to earn technical and entrepreneurial skills. Because not every young person received an education these trainings should be concrete and applied to realistic situations with practice in enterprises.

As Mabaya, Christy, & Bandama, (2010) argue, "academic institutions are no longer the sole guardians of knowledge. In addition to traditional institutions such as universities, colleges, technical colleges, vocational schools and extension agencies, new models are emerging out of entrepreneurship and executive training programmes by NGOs." These new organisations should

be promoted because they open new opportunities of employment for youth and fill the gap left open in agrobusinesses in need of skilful and motivated persons.

### 7.3. Facilitating interactions

#### 7.3.1. Finding new ways of interacting

Finding new ways of interacting is about access to information. In order to access information, it needs to be available which also implies that it should be diffused in an appropriate manner. To access information, it is also necessary to be able to reach out to it thanks to an appropriate use of the technologies.

**Access to information:**  
- Availability of the information  
- Appropriate use of the information technologies

In Benin, access to information is an issue. Communication is limited, awareness campaigns are hard to realise outside of urban areas. Some places are very isolated, transportation infrastructures can be inexistent, thus making the diffusion of information and technologies more complicated. In rural and isolated areas, telephone networks and internet connections if existent, can be difficult to reach. Therefore, access to information is unequal depending on the location and the situation in terms of infrastructures and access to technologies, networks... (Barlet et al., 2016).

Information is mostly transmitted through face-to-face interactions and personal networks. This creates problems of inclusiveness and equity. Jobs are transmitted to persons of the same families or the same social circles (6.3.1.). Not only it creates isolation of groups of individuals but it limits innovation which often comes out of interactions between

FIGURE 10: PROCESS FACILITATING THE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN BUSINESSES AND YOUTH

persons having different places in the society, views and needs.

Interactions between different groups of people are so far too limited to have an efficient production and diffusion of innovation (Zanello et al., 2016). In order to improve both the production of innovation within businesses and the participation of youth, communication must be rendered more inclusive and efficient. Even if Beninese persons, at least in urban areas, own mobile phones and use internet, they do not know how to access information with it. I met with young persons who use internet to communicate with their peers but were not aware of the possibility to use internet to search for any type of information. An informant travelled three hours from Bohicon to the capital city to give me the phone number of a training institution. I did not expect him to do this and I realised afterwards that this information was available online. Sometimes people own a technology that they do not know how to use properly in order to make the most efficient use out of it.

Mostly because people are not aware of the techniques to access information online or because they do not suspect their existence, they do not access relevant resources. Democratisation and better availability of ICTs<sup>4</sup> would improve the inclusion of marginalised groups. Not only it would

<sup>4</sup> ICTs: Information and Communication Technologies

allow to connect people between themselves but it should also be used to connect individuals to relevant pieces of information.

Ways of communication are now limited. People are embedded in their spatial and social environment. They only use face-to-face interactions and personal connections to exchange information. It isolates themselves from things that might be happening outside of their personal circles. Diversifying the types of interactions thanks to ICTs, to the creation of spaces of exchange might represent good opportunities to improve inclusiveness and participation.

Diversifying the modes of communication implies an expansion of actors with whom youth is interacting. It increases the chances of encountering interesting opportunities for youth. It would allow them to get chances out of the family circle or their close environment. By getting more interesting opportunities youth might develop and encounter their own ambitions. This would have a positive impact on their motivation to work.

#### **BOX 7. OBJECTIVE OF FINDING NEW WAYS OF COMMUNICATION**

Improve access to information is essential to:

- Have a more inclusive communication and more efficient diffusion of the information;
- Create awareness about the situation of the agri-food sector and raise interests;
- Increase the chances of reaching out to interested individuals;
- Increase the chances of matching opportunities with persons of relevant skills and knowledge.

It must be achieved through a through:

- A better availability of the information;
- A more efficient use of the tools allowing the access to it.

### **7.3.2. Influence of social surroundings**

The environment also plays a role in the facilitation of the interactions. Norms, regulations, and policies structure the interactions in the specific context in which businesses and youth are embedded. Social surroundings have an influence on the businesses and can either facilitate interactions or create barriers between the actors.

I demonstrated in the section 5.2.1. that businesses' internal organisation reflects the social order in Benin. Constant dynamic interactions between the business and its environment create an influence from one to the other and that is why social organisations are similar.

Therefore, if youth starts to be slowly included in businesses through activities and projects that serve purposes for both the businesses and the young persons, it is likely to have a positive impact on society. At the moment, businesses organisations reflect the society in which they are embedded (5.2.1.); when businesses will start accepting an increased participation of youth it will have an impact on the surroundings. Success stories serve as examples for the rest of the society. Positive examples of youth participation in business activities will trigger similar initiatives in surrounding businesses.

Opportunities of participation start appearing in the businesses studied. The maize transformation company intends to enhance exchanges between employees and especially between different working groups. The technical manager plans to organise regular meetings with all the workers of

the company. Even though youth might not be included in these moments of discussion at first, the intention of managers to create connections with workers is already a first step towards a better inclusion of marginalised groups (O'Donoghue et al., 2002).

Employees who regret the lack of transparency of the directors related to the management of the company will be able to use these spaces to share their thoughts, doubts and opinions. The technical manager of the maize company intends to have meetings with all the employees every three months in order to intensify communication. If at first these meetings will not necessarily be inclusive of youth and occasional workers; these exchanges will bring opportunities to discuss working conditions and are a first step towards an improved communication. It is a first step to create more opportunities of interactions between businesses and employees thus between businesses and youth.

In order to increase youth inclusion, it is possible to start slowly with a few initiatives of cooperation between businesses and youth that will inspire other enterprises to do the same. As O'Donoghue et al., (2002) suggest, businesses and youth might not yet be ready for a better participation. It is a process that takes time and preparation. Creating examples that will inspire further initiatives is a way of taking small steps to changing the society and the situation of vulnerable groups like youth.

### 7.3.3. Nurturing environment

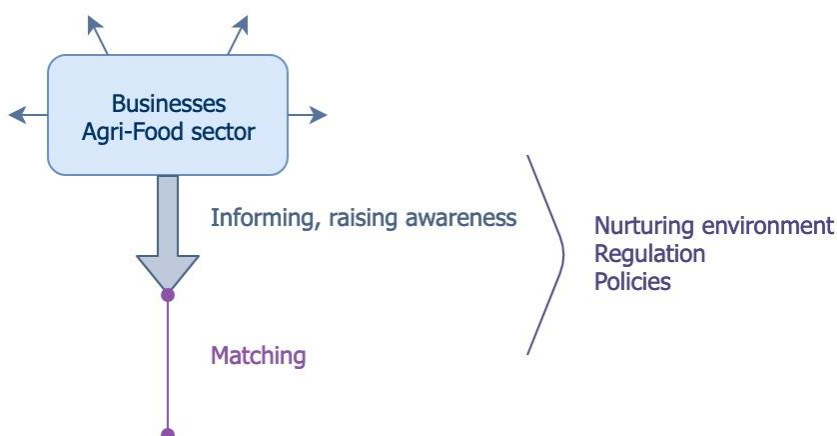


FIGURE 11: ENVIRONMENT INFLUENCING THE INTERACTION BETWEEN BUSINESSES AND YOUTH

In the previous section I argued that businesses and their social surroundings are bounded to each other. Constantly interacting, they influence each other for the better or for the worse. A supporting environment with a fluent diffusion of information would allow to raise awareness efficiently about the social sector. It would support the development of the agri-food sector and the participation of

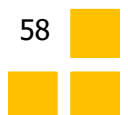
youth. However, patriarchal society in Benin creates barrier between the group and does not correspond to the nurturing environment presented above. Aside from actions to be implemented by the businesses to raise awareness and spread information, measures should be taken by the government to support the development of the agri-food sector, of the agrobusinesses and the matching processes with young individuals.

Governmental initiatives and policies promoting the agri-food sector, promoting the strengths of youth are measures that would support social change and indirectly change within the businesses. At the country level, education must be improved, rendered more practical to fit the requirement of the agri-food value chains actors. Actions can be intended to encourage economically initiatives supporting the participation of youth. On a country level, productivity of the agri-food sector and employment of youth are both crucial issues, measures that facilitate the matching between the

challenges of one and the advantages of the other are a necessary condition to nurture social change.

Innovations can emerge in inspiring conditions. The environment is an important factor in terms of innovation because it creates the conditions for the creation of innovation (Zanello et al., 2016). Positive interactions will create an innovation that has a positive impact on the society. Vossenberg, (2018) argues that the conditions in which the innovation are produced will reflect the inclusiveness of the product. She focusses on women as a vulnerable group and takes the example that when women are involved in the creation of an innovation it is more likely that this innovation will be accessible and useful to other women. Diversity in the teams producing the innovation will result in a wider diversity of consumer. This relates to the reflection between the businesses and the social environment and the influence that they have over each other.

The process of change within and outside the businesses is a constant negotiation between the actors and their environment. Having a perfectly nurturing environment to promote changes and interaction does not seem a realistic context. But initiatives from the institutions and the businesses themselves will contribute to this environment. Vossenberg, (2018:39) argues through her framework, there is a "need for evaluating how frugal innovation accrues demonstrable value directly to marginalized women and where and when frugal innovation may tackle adverse institutions and unlock a more egalitarian flow of benefits and opportunities to women, households, and communities." As much as the social environment is important to keep in mind when talking about interactions between businesses and youth, it is not the only condition to the intensification of the participation. Change must also happen in the environment, it is a long and continuous process and it will take place in parallel to change in the businesses.





## 8. Chapter 8: Conclusions

### 8.1. Communication

My findings revealed that youth is disempowered. They lack space for inclusion. Their position at the BoP has a severe impact on their personal development and self-confidence. They also generally lack knowledge about the job market and the agri-food sector which is potentially an employment provider.

In this research revealed that communication it at the core of many issues and solutions for better interactions between youth and the agrobusinesses. Internal communication issues are related to the lack of interactions between the different groups inside the businesses. Managers and directors are not consulting or involving operative and occasional workers in the discussions. Besides this, external communication issues affecting youth are related to the means of communication and to the space of at the disposal of youth to express themselves.

Internal communication is important to improve inclusion within businesses. Not only for youth, but also for vulnerable groups like women, intensifying communication and exchanges is a way of improving participation. Organising meetings to catalyse exchanges, consultation of the employees to receive their ideas and opinions, is a way of enhancing inclusion and innovation.

I discovered that youth passiveness is partly due to their lack of awareness about employment opportunities. For instance, young occasional workers of the maize company showed a lack of motivation in their work because they lacked purpose and hope that their situation would improve. Yet, the agri-food sector presents opportunities related to the lack of productivity and coordination of the agri-food value chains. There are opportunities to develop new activities but youth is not aware of the role it could play in it. They are not informed of the skills they should develop to fill the gaps in the agri-food value chains and improve their efficiency. By providing a better access and diffusion of the information, youth could become aware of these opportunities and it could as well improve their future.

To conclude, access to information is essential to:

- Raise awareness about the agri-food sector and create links between agrobusinesses and youth
- Reinforce youth's motivation, capacity building and interest for the agri-food sector

So far access to information is restricted because of the lack of technologies, infrastructures and their low quality. There are also issues related to the ability to use technologies like the internet. Finally, although youth premium access to job opportunities is their personal network, these networks are small and should be increase to improve the access to information.

Finally, I creating spaces for youth to express themselves. It would be a way to achieve their personal development. My findings show that youth does not benefit from such spaces yet. They have a lot of duties towards their families or communities which are time consuming and keeps them from exchanging with people for their age. Having youth expressing themselves is a way of making clear their ambitions and aspirations for the future.

Communication in a large sense represents a challenge to improve youth empowerment and interactions with businesses. It is involved in several elements of the model introduced in chapter 7. It is mentioned in the core of model in the interactions between businesses and youth. It is largely involved in the recommendations to empower youth. It appears on the left part through the access to information. Finally, it also comes out of the relationships between businesses and their environment.

There are challenges related to inclusion and space for youth in the businesses. There are also challenges of communication related to the access to information. Finally challenges related to communication also touch upon the empowerment of young persons and the stimulation of career development.

I suggest to do further research in order to determine the best ways of including youth, reaching out to them and letting them express themselves. Youth is a very diversified group. This study focusses on urban youth involved in agrobusinesses. They have specific needs and specific ways of expressing themselves related to the context in which they are evolving. Further research would allow to generalise my findings related to the domain of communication. It would allow to specify methods and tools appropriate to the needs of youth. Although I was able to identify that communication is an issue for youth, I could not make clear what are their preferred types of interaction, and why it fits them better.

## *8.2. Capacity building, creating space for youth participation*

Having youth informed of the opportunities for employment is not enough. Too often youth lacks skills and knowledge to get into the positions that are being offered. Although there are opportunities of employment to develop the value chains there is a still only a little matching with youth abilities. Because of the inadequate education youth, even those who studied agriculture, do not have the appropriate skills for employments in the agri-food value chains (Dramé-Yayé et al., 2011).

My findings conclude that youth should be matched with specific opportunities in agrobusinesses. Young people have the capacity to provoke change in certain situations. Positive change could be appreciated by businesses trying to solve challenges. There is work to do in order to have businesses accepting to give responsibilities to youth and to have youth prepared to work in the agri-food value chains.

Youth might also be prepared to achieve entrepreneurial activities. Since there are gaps in the value chains activities related to production, coordination, services to other actors can be developed. There is space for entrepreneurship. More and more initiatives exist to strengthen the capacities of youth in terms of business creation and development. These capacities should focus on the personal development of young persons, including their skills but also the knowledge in terms of production and the context in order to be able to take appropriate decisions regarding the market and the choice for potential partners.

Entrepreneurial or not, these trainings must be practically oriented because youth lacks the knowledge and the experience of the field activities. My informants highlighted it, now youth in Benin crucially lacks practical skills. Applied trainings felt more relevant to business actors than

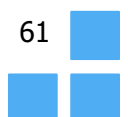
academic diplomas. Developing partnerships between businesses and training organisations to make the experience more practical is a way of achieving this.

Ultimately, policies and regulations structuring education must change in order to catalyse the efforts of youth into activities that are productive, relevant and sustainable for the economy of the country. Mindsets in Benin are still patriarchal, according only little space for the expression of youth in terms of career development and participation. Norms should also catalyse the expression of youth and its abilities.

Innovations are important to the development of the sector. There are innovations needed in terms of technique, but also social innovations in terms of interactions between the enterprises and individuals. Youth are relevant actors to produce innovations.

Youth participation must be happening with the impulsion of young individuals themselves. To increase their participation, youth has to demonstrate its value to business managers and other members of the society. Therefore, young people must be motivated and ready to demonstrate their skills in a context where they are often depreciated.

Participation of youth in the agri-food sector is a dynamic process involving individual actors, entities like business organisations and regulation structures. It is highly related on the cultural context and the social environment. Because of these interactions with external actors in the surroundings, change in the social organisation of the agrobusinesses will be related to change in the social surroundings.



## 9. *Chapter 9: Reflection and discussion on the research*

This chapter takes a closer look at the research process and the limitations of this study. It starts with a reflection on the research which completes the chapter 3 with a more personal tone. In the second part, I start discussions about the limitations of this research which concludes in recommendations for further research. I finish this thesis with a short reflection on the societal implications.

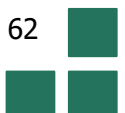
### 9.1. *Reflection on the research process*

Choosing the topic of this thesis was somehow a struggle. Just arrived in the field of social sciences, after six months, I had to think of a potential thesis topic. I found it difficult to apprehend a subject could be scientifically relevant, as well as wide enough to research and pertinent for my future career. I was hoping for a subject that would touch upon the agricultural field but that would first and foremost be useful for someone. Eventually, thanks to my teachers, I was able to delineate a topic around youth in agriculture that felt exciting to me because of the focus in itself but also because of its relevance in the current social debates.

Working on this topic was very pleasant. It was also satisfying to observe in the field that the theme of youth employment in agriculture was identified as a real issue by almost everybody. Today, I am very glad with this choice. I feel that in the past months I have been making a lot of progress on an academic and personal level.

One of the main hassles was to be working alone. Before this exercise I never really appreciated working alone because I often felt insecure and I liked to be able to discuss with a partner before taking decisions. This research was a good exercise to put in practice my personal skills as a researcher and my ability to take decisions. It was a challenge in the sense at it was also one of the first time I was practicing research in the field and in a cultural context that was very different from what I was used to.

During the research process I had a lot of reflections on my position as a researcher. In this African context, I cannot neglect the fact that my position as a white young female researcher puts me in a particular situation regarding my informants. Being from a different culture created some distance at the beginning. I had to be patient and to explain several times the reason of my presence in order to be able to gain the trust of the people that I was observing and interviewing. Being a young girl was also a fact on which I had to pay attention. It eased my access to the groups of women who trusted me more easily. However, with young men my situation was more delicate. A few men were curious of my presence, the conversation was easy to start. Some men were shy and my condition as a white girl made it difficult to approach them. In this situation, I usually asked someone to introduce me to them and to start of conversation. But sometimes young men were also approaching me with different intentions than discussing about youth and the agrobusinesses. This situation was usually uncomfortable for me and I had to figure out strategies to approach them and keep the conversation focussed on the topics interesting for my research. Nevertheless, being young allowed me to reach out more easily to other young people.



In this research, although I have been a participant, I stayed an outsider. I tried to adapt and to put myself in their situation by practicing their activities and living in a Beninese family, but this process of adaptation took me some time and I was never really able to live my life as they are living theirs. The difference in habits, the need for a relative comfort, the language barrier and the culture differences were all barriers to my integrations in short time. Two months was not enough to apply correctly ethnographic methods and to be able to think and feel the same as my informants.

I decided to structure my findings around the main recurring issues and suggestions for improvement that I identified in the interviews and observations, in order to build a general narrative around the participation of youth. In two months, I heard many stories from youth themselves but also other people involved in the businesses. These stories were depicting the situation of youth, their attitude, with more or less details but often with rich and complex implications. I used the frameworks from the literature to organise these findings in a way that the message comes out of this research while conserving the richness of the details. I hope it makes it interesting to read and relevant for the development sector.

## 9.2. *Limitations of the research and the approach*

**Context relative** - This research is an exploration of the situation of youth in the context of the two agribusinesses in Benin. My findings are qualitative and highly context dependent. Data collection has been conducted in two businesses located in urban or semi-urban areas thus it is a specific context in terms of informants' access to infrastructure, education, life style. Although these businesses represent good example of agrobusinesses in general, they are embedded in specific areas and it might not be appropriate to generalise the findings to different types of actors of the value chains such as producers or suppliers in agricultural inputs because of the rural context in which they will be embedded. The SG cooperative and the maize company provide interesting data on the processing companies of the value chain, but this data is bounded in terms of space and limited to urban context in the South of Benin. I was able to generalise some findings and make recommendations for youth and agrobusinesses but further research should be conducted to triangulate the data with different cases.

**Language** - Language represented one of the main limitations this research process. As I explained in the previous section, in two months I could not completely adapt myself and fit entirely in the Beninese system. I had to cope with the language issues. Many of the mundane conversations between actors happened in their local language, I was not able to understand the subject of the conversation. It happened to be an issue, especially in the first business where an important part of the actors did not speak French. It deprived me of data that might have been relevant. Even if I selected informants who spoke French, not all of them had a good level of education. They were sometimes struggling with French as it is not their native language. It was sometimes difficult for them to organise their thoughts or to understand my questions because they were not used to being asked personal questions or opinions. Every time I tried to reflect on my own behaviour and to adapt myself to my informants. I intended to triangulate the data with each informant by asking similar questions in different ways. Afterwards there was a need to interpret the data given by my informants to reveal the understatements.

**Informants** - Although I did not have any issue finding interested respondent, it was sometimes difficult to create a bilateral exchange. With a few informants that I interviewed formally the

conversation did not start even if I tried to ask open questions. For this reason, I preferred to have more informal conversations in order to keep the informant relax even if it meant that I could not record or take notes at the same time.

**Gender** - This study explores youth as a group. More specifically it focusses on youth that is already, or could potentially be involved in the agrobusinesses but it does not make a specification in terms of gender. Indeed, I tried to stay gender neutral and give the same attention to male and female informants. Nevertheless, youth participation of women is not equal to men. Especially in the agrobusinesses where physical activities take place requiring strength, men are usually favoured for certain tasks and women are assigned to others. Besides, I explained in the previous section that my gender had an effect on the data collection. Although I did not intentionally focus this research on men or women, it is possible that my own position as a researcher and the equal situation of the informants created a bias in this sense. I intended to reflect on my behaviour and agency as a researcher when collecting data and writing this report. Although this report focusses on youth as a whole in broad and general terms, it must not be forgotten that needs and perceptions of women and men might differ from each other.

**Diverse group** - Youth is a group including a lot of diversity and particularly difficult to target. Not only it implies to consider questions related to gender but it also raises questions related to its own definition. As I mentioned at the beginning of this report and then discussed in the fourth chapter, there is no universal definition of youth. For this study, because I had the opportunity to interact personally with my informants I defined youth as a transition period where the individual seeks stability and focusses on its own future. It implies that I considered as 'young' individuals of more than 35 years old but perceived as 'adults' people of slightly less than 30 years old because they already had children and considered that their work was dedicated to their children and not to themselves or the construction of their future anymore. The barrier between youth and adulthood is blurry, it is highly dependent on the behaviour, social interactions and the perceptions of the individual. Research encounters a limitation because the core concept of youth is hard to operationalise and highly dependent on the definition chosen by the researcher and the perception he or she has of the concept.

### 9.3. *Recommendations for further research*

**Communication** - In the conclusions I mentioned the need to do research on communication and youth. Youth is a diverse group but it also has its own specificities related to the transition they are performing and the specific position they are being given in the society. Youth also represents the future of the society and communication is a domain of study that is evolving. Studying the communication of youth is also a way of approaching the new types of communication that will develop themselves in a close future. More research is needed on the modes of communication preferred by youth because it would allow to ground development intervention and to use appropriate methods to target youth and support their empowerment. The study of communication surrounding youth is broad. It touches upon the communication styles, the communication modes, the access to information, the types of expression. It is related to the needs of youth in terms of capacity building and skill development. It should serve the necessity to create matches between opportunities of the agri-food sector and youth. Just like this current research, study of the communication of youth should be contextual and exploratory to identify the appropriate ways of communicating.



**Gender** - Further research can be done to specify the interactions of young women independently from young men to the agrobusinesses. Because inequalities of gender are very marked in West Africa, they have different social interactions, they occupy different positions within the businesses. Their characteristics should be studied independently in order to highlight the differences and similarities of the two groups and to target them better in further studies or interventions. Although studies on gender are very common and sometimes even focussed on young women, they are not necessarily contextualised in the domain of the agrobusinesses.

**Triangulation** - Further research could be achieved by someone local on a similar topic in order to triangulate the data and eventually complete the findings. Although I tried to reflect on my own work as a researcher and my implication in the project, it is impossible to delete all the bias related to culture and gender. It might be interesting and relevant to triangulate the data by someone local who can also understand the language to observe how much the obstacles of identified in the limitation are impacting the general recommendations concluding this research. The findings of another researcher could complement my findings and add scientific relevance to the subject.

**Context** - This research is placed in the specific context of agrobusinesses in the south of Benin. However, case study research in different context is relevant in order to build knowledge on the situation in Benin in a wider context and to give more specific recommendations. Research might be done in rural areas, more or less isolated, in the capital city, in the north of Benin or in the neighbouring countries. Interactions between these different studies would allow to take out very general recommendations and to determine policies on a global level. On a small-scale research is important to localised interventions to support the empowerment of youth.

#### 9.4. *Societal implications*

Although a lot of initiatives are currently targeting youth to reinforce their capacities and help them in their career development, these initiatives are not necessarily inclusive of all youth. It is often young persons who are the most motivated and the most pro-active who benefit from these interventions. Nevertheless, my findings highlight a lack of motivation of youth related to the lack of information, inspiration, the important duties to their families. To empower youth, it is important to target the group in its completeness and not only target specific individuals. Even though it might not be realistic to target the entire group, this study of the different pathways of youth towards employment in agrobusinesses gives hindsight on the general attitudes and interactions involving youth in this sector. Taking them into account for further intervention would allow to increase their inclusiveness and thus to have a wider effect. The study focusses on youth in a specific context, but in its diversity. The report highlights that some young people are more proactive than others, some are not necessarily motivated by jobs in the agrobusiness sector. It seeks to the reasons of this lacks of motivation and suggests recommendation to raise awareness and hope amongst youth. Appropriate interventions, policies must be put in place to target not only the most prominent actors but to generally empower youth as a group.

The societal relevance of this research rests in its uniqueness to explore youth in a specific context but as a diversified group and to formulate recommendations for the empowerment of the group as a whole. Nowadays, youth in Africa is the subject of numerous attentions and very diversified actions. This research in the specific urban context of the south of Benin adds knowledge to the literature about youth and agribusinesses.

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# Appendix A: Framework of youth participation

## – 7P model

TABLE 1: GIST OF THE 7P MODEL DEVELOPED BY CAHILL AND DADVAND (2018) IN THE YOUTH PARTICIPATION FRAMEWORK

DOMAIN	OBJECTIVE	ASSOCIATED QUESTION
Purpose	<p>"Political, ethical and pragmatic purpose of the business should inform its design."</p> <p>"Opportunities to participate are not created as an end point but rather as a mean to generate social good."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What does the business aim to achieve?</li> <li>- What opportunities can be constructed to enable young people to play an active role in shaping or evolving programme activities?</li> </ul>
Positioning	<p>"Ways in which young people are culturally framed and understood in terms of what is possible or desirable in terms of their contribution"</p> <p>"Positioning allowed them to recognise each other as change agents and providers of service rather than mere victims or as recipients of aids"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How are young people positioned within the wider cultural discourses, and how might this limit what is initially imagined to be possible?</li> <li>- How are young people positioned within the business itself and how do they in turn position others?</li> <li>- What processes might work to interrupt limiting assumptions about the capacity of young people?</li> </ul>
Perspectives	<p>"Take into account the differences and diversities that exist between individuals and among groups of young people"</p> <p>"Various cultural traditions and hierarchies surrounding gender, social class, ethnicity and ability may influence who can be heard, who can be reached and who is willing to participate"</p> <p>"it is important to devise processes which actively address ways to reach, recruit and learn from the perspectives of those who might otherwise remain marginalised"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Whose perspectives and voices are included, excluded or privilege in the program?</li> <li>- What methods are used to invite diverse perspectives?</li> <li>- Who remains marginalised or is rendered 'voiceless' in the process?</li> </ul>
Power relations	<p>"A recognition that power is relational invites reflection on how individuals are positioned in relation to each other"</p> <p>"Power relations not only play out between adults and young people, but also between young people themselves."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How are roles and responsibilities assigned, adopted and enacted in the business?</li> <li>- How are the relationships managed to ensure equity and respect is enacted between all parties?</li> </ul>
Protection	<p>"Protection can be used as a lens through which to consider vulnerabilities alongside capabilities"</p> <p>"On the one hand participation is a 'right' which is in itself in need of protection. On the other</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the balance between practices used to promote protection and those used to enhance participation?</li> </ul>

hand, the social and political act of participation can be experienced as personal, social or political risk depending on the culture, context, circumstances and methods used."

- What measures are needed to protect young people's political, social and material access and safety?
- How can young people themselves play an active role in ensuring the safety of their peers and those affected by their programs?

#### Place

"Participation occurs within spaces, be they material, relational, discursive or virtual."  
"Place-based perspectives can be particularly helpful, for example, in identifying gender vulnerabilities around travel, or social or cultural norms or hierarchies which might prescribe who might feel comfortable to attend or speak in particular places, or transact via oral, written or digital media."

- What are the social, physical and virtual spaces in which participation can take place?
- How does place or context affect what is possible or desirable in relation to participation?
- What mediates access to particular spaces and places?
- What strategies might be needed to create reach and access to the spaces of participation?

#### Process

"Process is the frame through which to attend to the alignment between intent and methods, or between ends and means."  
"Process refers to the methods that are used to invite and sustain interactions throughout the participatory project"

- How will the methods structure and enable participatory exchange, and critical and creative thought?
- Which methods will best foster practices of inclusion, respect and support for others?



## Appendix B: List of interviews

In the following tables I listed the remarkable interviews that I had with actors in both companies. This list is not exhaustive, for instance it does not include the punctual informal conversations that I had every day with occasional workers and individuals outside of the businesses.

### *SG Business*

Fieldwork was carried out in the SG business from the 05/11/2018 to the 28/11/2018.

TABLE 2: LIST OF INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED IN THE SG BUSINESS

Date	Informant	Type of actor	Young?	Type of interview (Reference)	Duration
09/11/2018	Justin	Secretary of the cooperative	No	Formal (R002)	1h28
14/11/2018	Marguerite	Salesperson	No	Formal (R003)	0h12
15/11/2018	Bérénice	Intern	Yes	Formal (R004)	0h21
22/11/2018	Casimir	Head of logistics	Yes	Formal (R005)	0h39
27/11/2018	Pascal	Treasurer	No	Formal (R006)	0h29
Everyday	Raphaël	Director	No	Informal	-

### *Maize transformation company*

Fieldwork was carried out in the maize transformation company from the 30/11/2018 to the 20/12/2018.

TABLE 3: LIST OF THE INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED IN THE MAIZE TRANSFORMATION COMPANY

Date	Informant	Type of actor	Young?	Type of interview (Reference)	Duration
04/12/2018	Germaine	Leader of the packaging workshop	No	Formal (-)	0h45
11/12/2018	Euloge	Administrative and financial manager (MAF)	Yes	Formal (R008)	0h40
12/12/2018	Yves	Technical manager	No	Formal (R009)	0h34
12/12/2018	Parfait	Electrician	Yes	Informal	1h00
13/12/2018	Rachida	Women occasional worker	Yes	Formal (R010)	0h16
13/12/2018	Eusèbe	Men occasional worker	Yes	Formal (-)	1h00
14/12/2018	Louis	Team leader	No	Formal (R011)	0h15
14/12/2018	Gerald	Chief electrician	No	Informal	0h45
Date	Informant	Type of actor	Young?	Type of interview (Reference)	Duration

18/12/2018	Matthias	General director	No	Formal (-)	0h45
18/12/2018	Firmin	Commercial director	No	Formal (R012)	0h31
18/12/2018	Zadji	Financial director	No	Formal (-)	0h20
20/12/2018	Euloge	Men occasional worker	Yes	Formal (-)	0h57
Everyday	Euloge	MAF	Yes	Informal	-
Everyday	Madeleine	Salesperson, head of the laboratory	No	Informal	-
Everyday	Yves	Technical manager	No	Informal	-

## Appendix C: Story and pictures of Soy Goussi

*Soy Goussi* is the main product of the SG cooperative.

It was produced for the first time in 1995 after two persons mistakenly put soy seed into the hot press instead of letting it cool down. A paste came out of the press on one side and oil on the other.

After this fortunate mistake with the press, they tried to eat the paste with a spicy tomato sauce and found out that this new meal tasted like Goussi, a famous, traditional and local meal at the time. Goussi was usually made with meat but the soy paste gave similar taste and texture as the meat did.

That's why members decided to call this paste "*Soy Goussi*".



FIGURE 12: SOY GOUSSI THAT COMES OUT OF THE PRESS (LEFT), SOY GOUSSI AFTER ROASTING (RIGHT)



FIGURE 13: DIFFERENT TYPES OF PACKAGING (THE CHEAPEST ON THE LEFT AND THE MOST EXPENSIVE ON THE RIGHT)

## *Appendix D: Pictures of the maize company*



FIGURE 15: PILES OF FLOUR BAGS ROTTING IN THE STORAGE UNIT



FIGURE 16: SCALE TO WEIGHT THE TRUCKS WITH MAIZE SEEDS



FIGURE 14: FACILITIES OF THE MAIZE TRANSFORMATION COMPANY





## *Appendix E: Evaluation of youth participation in professional activities*

This section aims at evaluating the participation of youth in the two businesses where this study was achieved. The structure of the analysis is based on the framework developed by Cahill & Dadvand (2018).

### ⇒ Purpose

The objectives of the two businesses I visited is to achieve enough rentability to allow members of the SG cooperative to make a comfortable living out of their professional activity and to allow the maize company to make enough profit, develop activities and become leader of the market.

Both businesses are profit driven. In this sense, participation of youth and women is not a desirable end in itself.

The businesses are designed so that the most educated persons are placed at the top of the decision-making pyramid because their skills and knowledge should allow an appropriate management. Genuinely, education is a “necessary condition to innovation” but it is not the only important factor (Zanello et al., 2016).

⇒ Purpose of businesses to increase profit and productivity

### ⇒ Positioning

As it is explained in the previous paragraphs, youth in the context of the study is evolving in a patriarchal society which limits their autonomy and capacity to take decisions. To a certain extent, this type of social organisation constraints youth to accept precarious jobs as occasional worker and to comply to the requests of their father or hierarchical superior within an enterprise. Youth is located at the bottom of the pyramid (BoP).

The agency of youth to participate in the businesses is limited by their social place as well as the economic situation of Benin. Within the businesses, behaviours that limit the participation of youth like the social order and lack of communication are hard to transform. They need to be acknowledged by directors as limitations before they act to correct it. The director of the maize company has a bad opinion of youth because of bad experiences with some of them and does not seem ready yet to facilitate their inclusion in his enterprise.

Other employees also need to acknowledge the strengths of young workers in order to give them the possibility and the space to express themselves within the enterprises. In the interviews I conducted, only a few persons acknowledged the mental abilities of youth.

In the maize company, the administrative and financial manager mentioned “youth is equal to older people in terms of skills and they should be given the same chances”. In the SG cooperative, the treasurer and the head of logistics fought for youth to be included in the administrative counsel. They perceive youth as a group of people who are more active and more eager to act for changes than old people. However, they had to confront themselves with other members of the administration counsel and argued a lot before succeeding in integrating youth.

⇒ Youth positioned at the BoP

## ⇒ Perspectives

Perspectives considered in the businesses appear to be quite limited. Because of the lack of communication, managers take the liberty to take decisions by themselves. They are not necessarily aware of the views of other members and workers because of the lack of space to discuss about it.

In the maize company, even if the directors are in touch with managers and leaders of several teams they do not have contact with operative members of the factory hence do not take their opinions into account. Progressively, actions seem to be taken to improve this. The technical manager mentioned having the ambition to organise meetings with the entire team. Permanent workers are also represented by staff representatives in regular meetings. However, the extent to which opinions and advices from the bottom of the pyramid are considered during the decision-making process, is unclear.

Similarly, I learnt that women were present in the administrative counsel of the SG cooperative. Yet, in the meeting in which I assisted, men mostly talked in French and did not translate for the women. Thus, it can be questioned how much their contributions are valued and considered before taking decisions.

To a certain extent, actions seem to be taken to include more diversified perspectives in the management of both businesses. However, it can be questioned how much these actions are really inclusive of the new perspectives of marginalised groups like youth.

⇒ Perspectives of youth not included

## ⇒ Power relations

In terms of power relations, because of the hierarchical organisation of both businesses, educated men are clearly on top of the power pyramid. They have the power, the knowledge and skills to take decisions regarding the future of the company. Youth on the other hand is only present as occasional workers. Their opinion is not perceived as valuable because they are temporary and unexperienced workers.

⇒ Youth submitted to power relations

## ⇒ Protection

Youth as occasional workers is not represented in neither of the two businesses. Not only they are not declared so cannot benefit from social protection like health insurance but also, because they are seen as temporary employees, their interests within the businesses are not protected. Contrary to permanent workers, they do not even have staff representatives. They do not have access to any space of exchange. It keeps them from explaining their opinions and having their interests protected.

The businesses do not have interest in promoting protection of occasional workers because they do not feel responsibility towards them. Indeed, the state of the job market allows enterprises to have many candidates for both occasional and permanent positions. Because occasional work does not require specific skills or experience, they can easily be replaced if needed, without causing problems to the agrobusinesses.

⇒ Youth's place is not protected



## ⇒ Place

In order to improve participation of youth it would be necessary to first instore representation of occasional worker and second to intensify the spaces for exchanges.

The limited amount of spaces of exchange affects negatively the participation of marginalised groups like youth but also affects the results of the businesses. Lack of space for discussion and exchanges restrains the opportunities to explore the potential of human resources present in the business. Zanello et al., (2016) mentions that one of the barriers to innovation creation and diffusion in developing countries is the lack of human resources. In this situation resources seem present but their capacities are not linked thus restraining the potential of the companies to create and diffuse their innovation.

⇒ Youth's place is insufficient to achieve their empowerment

## ⇒ Process

It is questionable whether increasing the participation of marginalised groups will immediately add value to the companies and will help them achieve their objectives. Many conditions still need to be reunited in order to improve inclusion during the production of innovation in agrobusinesses in Benin.

On a small scale and a short term, at the level of the businesses, increasing youth participation may not imply breakthrough changes but with time and on a larger scale, increasing the participation of youth could have good consequences in the wider cultural environment of youth.

Vossenbergh, (2018) in her framework mentions institutional changes. She looks at whether frugal innovation impact positively empowerment, well-being, formal and informal institutions. Her framework allows to evaluate the consequences of innovation on marginalised groups (in her case women) and whether they contribute on a larger scale to improving their situation.

There is a possibility that, in the situation of youth in the two agrobusinesses, intensifying the processes of participation could increase the self-esteem of young people, and contribute to empower them and improve their well-being. If their participation leads to good consequences for the businesses, ultimately perceptions of youth in and outside the businesses could change. This relate to the findings of Leliveld and Knorringa (2018) who however conclude that research still needs to be done in order to understand better the implications of frugal innovation on development.

Through the willingness to organise meeting in with the employees, the maize company seems to be evolving towards a better participation of its employees, including youth. In the SG business some actors are starting to fight for the inclusion of youth and the necessity to have a more diverse managing team.

Increasing the participation of youth requires structure and critical exchanges in order to assess the value of the process. As the businesses appear to reflect the social organisation in Benin, suddenly increasing participation, even if it would mean more inclusion and improvement of the performances, could have unintended consequences. Thus, the process of inclusion needs to be progressive and measured.

⇒ Processes are slightly evolving towards an increased participation of youth