The Centre has training units in several regions of the country, where they are most needed. But until a study was carried out in Upper Volta, it was not known what was needed. Based in the Voltaic capital of Ouagadougou, the Centre for Documentation of Economic and Social Research (CEDRES) was established in the 1980s to document the experiences of artisans. The study showed that artisans in Upper Volta were divided between those who specialized in metalwork, carpentry, and masonry, and those who were involved in agriculture. While some artisans were able to take advantage of opportunities, others were not. According to Mr. Thiombiano, the results of the CEDRES study have shown that the artisans are faced with obstacles including low prices for their products, lack of access to credit, and competition from imported farm equipment. The study demonstrated that, when organized and supported, artisans can play a significant role in rural development. Therefore, efforts should be made to improve the living conditions of artisans and increase their economic opportunities.

Mr. Thiombiano has found that some of the artisans have a significant capacity for innovation. In Kolonkan, Mr. Démé Sidiki developed ploughs with a double moldboard: According to Mr. Gadiaga, this improved plough enables farmers to work more quickly. Mr. Démé Sidiki’s operation is also efficient compared to those of some artisans. While he can make a plough in one day, it takes another (non-CNPAR-trained) colleague in nearby Kouggny village four or five days to manufacture the same implement.

The impact of other trades, however, is much less obvious. It is hard to know to what extent carpentry and masonry have really benefited farmers or improved the standard of living of the artisans themselves. Because of this, the researchers suggest further development efforts be concentrated more on smithies and their forges.

Even in the case of forges, however, it would be a mistake to think that the situation for artisans is as good as it might be. According to Mr. Thiombiano, the results of the CEDRES study have shown that the artisans are faced with obstacles involving equipment, raw materials, and marketing.

In theory, when they leave CNPAR, the artisans are entitled to a certain amount of material or a small loan from the government in order to get started. In practice, however, the means made available are inadequate. Some artisans have had to abandon their trade before they even begin to work in it. A scarcity of raw materials often increases the cost of the finished products, making it difficult for artisans to compete in a poor market. Rural artisans must also face competition from imported farm equipment as well as goods manufactured in relatively modern factories.

According to Mr. Gadiaga, Démé Sidiki the Kolonkan blacksmith had to take risks in order to capture the regional market and, after that, part of the national market. He had to sell his ploughs on credit to farmers in several villages. But the risk had its rewards. Now, a few years later, Sidiki’s equipment can be found in many regions of the country.

What should be done to multiply the Sidikis of Upper Volta? Set up a credit structure for artisans, develop cooperatives?

The CEDRES study demonstrates that, when organized and able to take advantage of opportunities, artisans can provide basic support for development of the rural sector. Training of rural artisans is therefore vital. In its own way, CNPAR has helped. It has trained 1000 artisans — 1000 potential driving forces of development.

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