

The Implementation of Environmental Policies in Africa: An Example from Senegal

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The implementation of environmental policy in Africa ... A car stops in a village; a team gets out. The population has been informed beforehand, and the dignitaries, dressed in their most beautiful grand boubou, are already waiting for the important visitors to be welcomed. The meeting is at the youth centre; the team are offered the best places at the table and the dignitaries seat themselves at the other end. The other villagers are crowded outside behind the windows and in the doorway. A member of the team presents the visitors: he speaks of a project for the management of the soils, the animals and the trees, and he mentions the words participation and partnership, and the sum of 18 billion CFA to help the population. The vice-president of the rural council then speaks for the president and sketches projects the village received before: a dispensary, a youth centre and a women's house, and, most important, a water tower; he then expresses his joy at the new project, too. The sous-préfet, in the team, tells the visitors that all the rural communities of his district also have a 'crédit mutuel'. The white leader of the team wants to know more: what kind of credit system do you have here? Can a farmer obtain credit to buy fertilizer? No, the dignitaries nod a little blankly at the other end of the table; yes, says the youngest of them then, and he is able to explain how. The sous-préfet, who is nervously eyeing both the team and the village delegation, gives the impression of being relieved. The white woman in the team becomes a little impatient and starts posing sharp questions, which are answered most politely by the hosts. She wants to know why there's no female member on the rural council; the answer that the only woman has died and has not yet been replaced does not satisfy her, and she expresses her clear disappointment. The dignitaries maintain a civil silence and the chairwoman of the women's group, who is among them, remains silent but dignified, too. The sous-préfet interferes, saying that the people are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of having women in the council, and in other bodies; perhaps after the elections there will be more female members. The team seems satisfied and not much later the meeting is closed by one of the African team members. As they leave the building, the visitors are jostled by many women, who all want to shake hands. The white lady is wildly enthusiastic and over the festive noise cries out: 'Look, how calloused their hands are! One can see it is them that do the heavy work!'

She takes off her sun-hat and dabs off the sweat pouring down her temples. The team climb in the car again, and drive off down the red-dust road.

Introduction

The situation sketched above is the first contact of the PCGRN (*Projet Communautaire de Gestion des Ressources Naturelles*) with the rural community² of Kaymor, situated in the so-called Peanut Basin of Senegal. The PCGRN, a big project covering the years 1994-2000 and financed by USAID in collaboration with the Senegalese government, is paraded as one of the first examples of a new generation of development projects. As such, it beautifully reflects changes in development thinking in general and thus in the approach of USAID, as well as in Senegalese governmental policy. The new mottos can be summarized as 'participation and partnership' and 'decentralization and responsabilization'.

By now, there is already reasonable experience with all kinds of participatory projects. It is clear that, while more practically oriented development specialists may have enthusiastic stories about good working projects involving local populations, anthropological scholars who take themselves seriously cannot but be sceptical about what has been achieved in the past. The number of studies on unsuccessful projects is legion (e.g. Franke and Chasin 1980, Hoebink 1988) and the 'remedies' developed for earlier failures do not seem to work any better (Huntington 1988, Quarles van Ufford 1988, Sylva 1992). The new buzzword 'participation' proves not to be the straightforward guiding principle that had once been assumed. First, there is the difficulty that the concept can be operationalized in very different ways, ranging from participation in activities only to participation in the entire decision-making process of a project. Second, following a participatory approach means that one has to make thorough allowance for local social realities such as local power dynamics, local values and perceptions (see e.g. Hansen and Erbaugh 1987); these cannot be neglected. Working *with* people involves meeting them and having real interaction, which is often a hazardous undertaking.³ Finally, such questions arise as: who will be invited to participate? Who or which organizations are the legitimate representatives of (which categories of) the local population? (See e.g. Snrech 1988, Venema 1995). And: is the local level ready and able to participate, or does a participatory project need to be preceded or accompanied by more fundamental interventions in the areas of democratization and institution-building? (see e.g. Wunsch and Oluwu 1990, OECD 1989).

In the context of this discussion I want to take a closer look at the PCGRN. First, it will be shown how the various inputs by the different partners are reflected in the project design. After presenting the local scene, I will elaborate on how the new insights and new approaches work out in reality, when confronted with local participants. In analyzing the kick-off of the project in Kaymor and its first local activities, consisting of the installation of a local management committee and the elaboration of a *Plan d'Aménagement du Terroir*, I will sketch the interplay between local factors, such as political relations and social values, and factors brought in by the project. How does this affect implementation? The observations made will lead, finally, to some concluding remarks and reflections on the possibilities and constraints of this new kind of participatory project for the management of natural resources in Africa.

The PCGRN: a multi-stranded project design

As said, the *Projet Communautaire de Gestion des Ressources Naturelles* is a project initiated and financed by USAID in collaboration with the Senegalese government. Its main objective is to increase the revenues of the population by means of a sustainable exploitation of natural resources. To this end, it promotes local initiatives, individual as well as communal, that entail improved natural resource management. The working strategy is to elaborate a *Plan de Gestion du Terroir* for the rural community in cooperation with the local population, containing a problem analysis as well as action plans to improve the present situation. A management committee, elected by the people themselves, manages finance and supervises all the activities executed in the framework of the project. This means essentially that more or less technical strategies with governmental agencies as the main actors have been exchanged for a strategy in which the local population plays the main part.

In concreto, the PCGRN can be seen as a continuation and an extension of the *Projet de Réboisement au Sénégal* (PRS), which was started in 1986 by the Senegalese government and USAID in the framework of a vast programme of reforestation and soil conservation. What was new about this project was that it aimed at encouraging private forestry and augmenting and diversifying forestry revenues. The project worked diffusely, in villages around the country, but in order to better incorporate the wishes of the local population into the activities, the project started a test programme (1993-1994) focussing on elaboration of an agroforestry development plan at rural community level, with a supervisory role for the rural council. The results of this test programme were considered so promising that it was decided to

adopt the same approach for the PCGRN, taking the rural community as the unit of intervention and the rural council as the primary point of contact, at the same time extending the scope from forestry to the management of natural resources in general. In the PCGRN, then, sectoral approaches were left behind and an integrated view of environmental problems was explicitly adopted. However, many employees of the PRS transferred to the PCGRN, leading to a situation whereby the majority of the PCGRN staff are foresters.

Clearly, the project's accent on participation is in line with the general trend in development thinking and in approaches towards environmental management in the Third World that have emerged since the eighties (Chambers 1984, Harrison 1987, Conroy and Litvinoff 1988). In the analysis of USAID, however, popular participation is not only a local institutional issue. It is held that better management of Senegal's natural resources necessitates institutional restructuring in three respects:

First, while the government has already created and revised many laws and rules to improve local resource management (e.g. the new Forestry Code of 1993), much is still to be done to enhance understanding of these at the level of the responsible state agencies (e.g. the Forestry Service, the CERP), the local functionaries (the rural councillors) and the local population.

Second, at the governmental level coordination between ministries and central agencies must be improved. Much has already been done in this direction, by the creation in May 1993 of a Ministry of Environment and Nature Conservation, and by spreading the former ministry of Rural Development and Water Management over the Ministry of Agriculture and a new Ministry of Water Management. However, cooperation and coordination must become more effective.

Third, at the local level increased funding must be made available to the local population to give them the opportunity to finance their own projects concerning improved management of their natural resources. (Ministère de l'Environnement et de la Protection de la Nature: Présentation du Projet de Gestion Communautaire des Ressources Naturelles, undated)

Given this analysis, the PCGRN aims at an intervention at all the above levels. At the national level, it will lend support to the Council for the Environment and Natural Resources (CONSERE), an interministerial committee placed under the tutelage of the Ministry of Environment and charged, *inter alia*, with elaborating a National Environmental Action Plan. At the intermediate level, assistance will be directed mainly towards the CERP (*Centre d'Expansion Rurale Polyvalente*), in the form of financial support and education. At the local level, people will be supported

in setting up paying projects of their own and the rural council in improving its management capacities and augmenting its revenues.

As the above illustrates, USAID is cooperating closely with the Senegalese government in the PCGRN, and rightly so at all administrative levels. In fact, the PCGRN is proudly presented as supporting and furthering the policies of the Senegalese state, which, as in many other African countries, from the mid-eighties on has been pursuing a structural adjustment policy, meaning decentralization and/or privatization of many state activities. As Mr. Bathilie, the Minister of Environment and Nature Conservation, puts it: 'The project comes at a crucial moment in the economic and social history of the country: a new dynamic, a new economic strategy can be discerned, namely a participation of all actors in the conception, definition and execution of their strategies' (*Actes du séminaire de lancement*, p. 14; my translation). Delegating management responsibilities to the grassroots is not an easy issue, however; Bathilie admits that many obstacles still have to be overcome. He mentions bad management of their territories by the rural councils, and the fact that there are council presidents who allot land at will, without even a regular meeting of the council. Particularly now that the process of regionalization⁴ is in full swing, a real democratization of the institutions at the local level is what is required. It is proudly stated that the policies of the PCGRN dovetail perfectly with what is envisaged by the Senegalese state.

It can be concluded that the PCGRN is built on the following pillars: the idea of the necessity of the proper natural resource management (particularly stressed by the project staff), the idea of participation and partnership (particularly stressed by USAID), and the idea of democratization and delegation of responsibilities (particularly stressed by the Senegalese government). Let us now consider how these ideas work out in reality, as the project starts work in the rural community of Kaymor.

The rural community of Kaymor: old values and new strategies in a changing environment

Kaymor in the district of Médina Sabakh, department of Niour du Rip, region of Kaolack, is a medium-sized community with an area of 195 km², consisting of 23 villages with a population of 10, 311 (Seck 1995). The community is fairly homogeneous in ethnic and religious respects: most of the people are Wolof (90%), and the remaining are mainly Toucouleur. Practically everybody is Muslim,

adhering to the Tidjane or the Mouride brotherhood. Traditionally, Wolof society is hierarchically organized. Generally speaking, there is the caste of the *geer*, the nobles, and the caste of the *nieenio*, to which the artisans and the minstrels belong. Both castes are still divided into *diambour*, the freeborn, and *diam*, descendants of slaves. While 25 years ago this hierarchy was still an explicit reality for people in the community, largely defining social relations (see Venema 1978), now people no longer refer to it openly and deny its importance. In the background, however, its presence can still be felt: first, everybody knows exactly who belongs to which caste; second, prejudices towards other castes do exist;⁵ finally, relationships between families do not appear to have changed that much.⁶

Agriculture is the predominant activity, although many people have side-activities in the dry season, such as commerce or a handicraft. Peanuts are the main commercial crop. The main food crop is millet. In addition, crops such as corn, rice and cotton are grown. In the past decade, people have started practising horticulture in the depressions and near wells, and it is considered an activity with great economic potential. Its development is hampered, however, by water deficiency in the dry season and the isolated situation of the community, which makes it difficult to find a market. Apart from agriculture, animal husbandry is also important. While livestock are used as draught animals and sometimes held in stables for fattening, livestock-rearing is still generally of an extensive nature. Possession of cattle is fairly unevenly distributed, some families owning a herd of a hundred head, while others have none. However, almost every family has some smallstock, such as sheep and goats.

Experts consider water erosion the main environmental problem of the area (ISRA 1986). The expansion of peanut cultivation from the fifties onwards combined with substantial population growth led to an extension of the agricultural area, with marginal grounds unsuitable for agriculture being brought into use, and leading to the virtual disappearance of fallowing practices. Stripped of their vegetation, soils become an easy victim of the rains, which can be heavy and abundant. The difficulties faced by farmers in recent years in obtaining chemical fertilizers at a reasonable price have given them an additional incentive to increase the area under cultivation, just to obtain an adequate harvest.

Land pressure leads to competition among different usages: expansion of the area under cultivation is often at the expense of herding routes, and conflicts arise when herdsmen see their way to waterpoints barred, or, conversely, when their cattle enter fields under cultivation.

Finally, land pressure leads to a decline of the bush, making it more difficult to obtain firewood, wood for construction and other forest products; also the game population has undergone serious decline.

Until the mid-eighties, the state was an important development agent in the area. Regional development organizations promoted and supported peanut and cereal cultivation (SODEVA) and the production of cotton (SODEFITEX). Village cooperatives distributed seed and fertilizer on economical terms and guaranteed the commercialization of crops. As a consequence of structural adjustment policy, however, a New Agricultural Policy was launched, implying a restructuring or liquidation of many state development institutions. For the farmers, this meant particularly that it became much more difficult to obtain seed and fertilizers. Devaluation in 1994 made things still worse, as the prices of inputs rose markedly.

The CERP (*Centre d'Expansion Rurale Polyvalente*), a multidisciplinary extension team founded in 1960 at the district level to assist the rural population, still exists as a state agency, but there is a general consensus about its malfunctioning (Ba 1985, Vengroff and Johnston 1989, Le Soleil 1996). For various reasons including inadequate funding, in Médina Sabakh the CERP does not cover the whole district but works mainly in the community where it has its headquarters.

Several NGOs have worked or are still working in the rural community, intervening to varying degrees and in varying areas: some of them offer only infrastructure (Caritas provided a water tower) or working materials (PAM offers material for horticulture), while others work with women's groups (the Catholic Mission in Nioro) or deploy activities for handicapped youth (the Norwegian Mission); Africare has a broader reach and works with entire villages, in which it creates village committees. Many NGOs prefer to work in small villages, declaring that these show greater social cohesion and fewer political cleavages. Local people relate that many former projects have failed merely because of a few people 'eating the money', leaving the work to others. That is why many people are discouraged and wary to cooperate; they prefer working for themselves or with close friends and relatives only.

Political cleavages are most obvious in the rural council. From its installation in 1974 onwards, the council has been monopolized by the Socialist Party, and in all those years not much has changed: the president is still the same, and of the 23 other council members 6 have been in office from the beginning. Village heads (4) and elders of the autochthonous families are still the backbone of the council. Slowly a new generation is making its appearance, but they still mainly descend from the same respected families. Since the end of the eighties, however, the Socialist Party

(P.S.) has been divided into two factions. The bipartition originates from the national level and is observable throughout the country, but for the Kaymorese people the representatives at the department level are the concrete leaders. The cleavage does not appear to be an ideological one: the choice for faction A or faction B is made mainly on the basis of relationships (family relations or personal relations, clientelistic relations or relations of alliance, long-standing relations or promised relations).⁷

The votes and, consequently, the decisions taken by the rural council are highly influenced by adherence to one or other faction: if one adheres to faction A, one is almost automatically against a proposition of a member of B. A is in the majority; councillors of the opposite faction often show frustration and say that many issues are decided by the president together with his fellow A, without consultation of the B councillors.

It is remarkable that while differences in caste, ethnic group or religious brotherhood are generally glossed over and declared irrelevant, differences in political faction are brought into the open and are openly contested. What is more, politization does not remain limited to relations within the council, but from there pervades the lives of the common people, too.⁸

The PCGRN in Kaymor: project ideology and local perceptions

The PCGRN enters the local arena

The *Projet Communautaire de Gestion des Ressources Naturelles* officially started in October 1994 with a preliminary phase consisting of the installation of the various project structures and development of the strategies to be followed. In July 1995 a launching seminar was organized at which representatives of NGOs and governmental organizations were invited to get acquainted with the approach of the project.

A first selection of five communities⁹ with which to start the first phase was made on the basis of questionnaires sent to all *sous-préfets*, CERPs, and presidents of the rural councils in the regions of Fatick and Kaolack. These questionnaires were screened with the help of fixed criteria. Kaymor was selected, together with the two other communities of the same arrondissement, Medina Sabakh and Ngayene, and two communities in the region of Fatick, Mbellacadio and Diaoulé (in the arrondissement of Diakhao).

Remarkably, the president of the rural council does not seem to have seen the questionnaire. Just like his colleagues, he declares that he first heard about the PCGRN at a meeting in Médina Sabakh in November 1995, where they were informed about the scheduled project. Also, considering the criteria, one wonders why Kaymor has been chosen: besides physical criteria, there were socio-economic criteria such as the absence of deep internal conflicts between political parties or population groups, a dynamic president of the rural council, and experience of the council with activities of local resource management. All of these criteria Kaymor hardly meets. It seems that in the end regular payment of the head tax was decisive; it is not inconceivable that the *sous-préfet*, still young and just appointed in 1995, also played a positive role.

After the meeting in Kaymor on December 1st, 1995, described at the beginning, on the 15th of the month a meeting in Médina Sabakh was held for all the rural councillors of the arrondissement, at which the installation of the project was officially announced. The director of the project explained the aim once more: the development of local revenues by judicious management of the natural resources. He said that they should try not to put the project to shame; they were an example for the whole of Senegal.

Then it was explained that in the month to come a management committee for each rural community had to be elected, in which all the layers of the local community should be represented; this committee was to coordinate the activities and administer the finances; it would provide support to the rural council. Besides the committee, an information officer was also to be appointed. The staff stressed that the project had not come to give instructions. Instead, they would collect information right from the grassroots and try to find solutions together with the local population, who would be heard on their know-how. The money would be in the hands of the local community and administered by them through the management committee. It was said that there was a budget of 18 billion CFA for the whole project, to be spent on such items as a vehicle for the CERP, motorcycles for the information officers and a contribution to the rural councils to elaborate a management plan for their community. Besides these overall expenses, money would be also available to finance small projects of groups or individuals in the communities. The *sous-préfet* summoned the people to form economic units, the so-called GIEs¹⁰, as the project was not willing to cooperate with organizations lacking official legal documents. This was all repeated once more at a meeting held in Kaymor on the 28th of December.

Speaking with the people afterwards, it still all appeared to be rather abstract for them. What was most vividly remembered was the huge sum of money that would be available.

This was also the information disseminated by certain politicians who by that time had already incorporated the project into their strategies. Thus, H, a rural councillor and helping hand of the council president, together with a fellow local politician who was also of tendency A, went out into the villages to tell the people they had to obtain their GIE documents in order to be eligible for participation. If the people gave them the required sum of 42,000 CFA, they would go to Kaolack to settle things with the authorities.

The people responded massively. While it had been possible to form a GIE since 1984, only one had been formed in Kaymor, and it existed merely on paper. In January 1996, however, throughout the community a total of thirty were created. Thus, Colomboudou, with a population of 1026, boasted 12 new GIEs at the end of January 1996, while Keur Samba Die (301 inhabitants) had 4. In the following months this number grew further, be it at a lower rate. Most GIEs were created in villages where faction A held a majority, meaning either that the politicians mainly approached their own supporters, or that only their supporters believed their words and followed the advice. In the village of Kaymor the picture was somewhat different. Because the meetings of the project took place there, the people were in close proximity to goings on, making them less dependent on politicians for their information.¹¹

Election of the management committee and selection of the information officer

In January 1996 a meeting was held to elect the management committee. The composition was fixed by the project as follows: 3 rural councillors, the chief of the CERP, the information officer, one representative of the craftsmen, one representative of the herdsmen, one representative of the agriculturalists, one representative of the committees for the management of the water towers, and one representative of the NGOs and development agencies/projects operating in the area, two representatives of the women's groups¹², one representative of the youth association, one Peace Corps volunteer and one representative of school pupils' parents. In addition, the community was divided into three zones, each with its own representative on the committee, too.

Each category had been informed of the meeting beforehand and had been summoned to set candidates; the final election took place during the meeting, which

was presided over by the *sous-préfet*, assisted by project representatives. It was stressed that capable people should be chosen, and that politics had to be left out.

The elections passed off without an incident. The category whose turn it was to vote (such as women, youth, craftsmen) stayed in the room, while the others waited outside. All the groups had already decided on their candidates during informal prior meetings, and all the candidates were thus chosen unanimously. Only at the election of the representatives of the rural council, which was last to vote, did tension mount. H presented the candidates: H himself, A, and M. They, too, were unanimously chosen, but K waited a while before raising his hand, and all around there was grumbling and astonishment. Then, two other councillors stood up and asked whether it would be possible to elect four council representatives to the management committee; if so, they wanted K to participate. The project director said the rules could not be changed at will, and the *sous-préfet* gave some encouragement by saying that perhaps K could be an information officer.

Only by way of a reconstruction could it be uncovered what had happened. The councillors had decided among themselves that faction A could supply two representatives, while faction B could supply one, in accordance with their representation in the council. For faction A there were H en A, but for faction B there was some rivalry between M en K. According to K (at 35 years the youngest councillor and one of few already concretely involved in natural resource management as the president of the local reforestation committee) it was he who had been proposed, but M (a sly old man and long-established politician) had subsequently made a deal with H in order to be presented as a candidate. As a result H, A and M ultimately served on the management committee as representatives of the council.

These political manoeuvres were continued during the election of the committee board, which was held in the following week. The board was to be composed of a president, a vice-president, a treasurer and two members, who were to be elected by and from the members of the management committee. There were several requirements: candidates should be able to count and to sign, that is to read and to write. H stated that M was not present, but that M had given him his identity card so that H could vote in his name.¹³ The project staff, however, refused to accept this. They went on to vote and explained that the president and the vice-president would be chosen by note, the other members by hand-raising. The spectators, who were sent outside but could still follow the proceedings via the windows and open doors, became repeatedly excited about (supposed) false or double voting. Finally, the result was announced: H had been elected president, A vice-president and S treasurer.

This result caused some anxiety among the population, for it was a public secret that for some years H had been involved in a sheep-fattening project, from which he had stolen a large sum of money; M's reputation was not unstained either. There were also doubts about the elected treasurer. Some were of the opinion that although the woman had been attending school, she was hardly able to read or write; others pointed out that she was too close a friend of the president of the committee and, as such, might be easily influenced by him. It was even suggested that both women in the committee had been pressured by the committee president to vote for him.¹⁴ Despite all the rumours, however, the majority soon accepted the situation because after all, they said, these people have been elected democratically ...

The next step was to elect an information officer, who was to serve as the liaison between the population and the management committee, as the committee secretary, and who was to report to the project staff. The job was a paid one (the salary being subject to negotiation with the management committee) and the man or woman selected would be appointed for two years. The selection criteria were: between 21 and 45 years' old; three years of high school education; living in the rural community; and speaking the local language fluently. A preference was expressed for candidates with some experience in community education and outreach. Candidates had to present a dossier comprising their birth certificate, residence certificate, diplomas, a doctor's certificate and a letter of motivation. The selection procedure consisted of a written test and an interview with the jury for those who had done best in the written part.

It appeared that the candidates generally had difficulties with this formal approach, to which they were unaccustomed. They had problems in collecting the necessary documents and there was some confusion about the entire procedure. Finally eighteen dossiers were presented, of which ten passed. Those rejected were deemed incomplete or inappropriate.

In the end, N won the race. Malicious tongues held this to be due to his being the son of a teacher, secretary of the P.S. at the arrondissement level. His main rival related that during the interview the jury, composed of three project members, asked the president of the management committee to come in and give his opinion. He was asked to say with which of the candidates he was best able to cooperate, and, so it was said, this had been decisive ... The same kinds of stories were to be heard about the appointments in the other communities of the district. Thus, it was said that in Ngayene the information officer had been elected because he was the brother of the president of the local management committee and in Médina Sabakh because he was in charge of youth affairs for the P.S..

It appears, however, that in Kaymor and in Médina Sabakh at any rate people were elected who have the required qualifications and who also in themselves are likely to be good information officers. The precise role played by politics remains obscure. What is clear, though, is that people tend to draw things into the political realm. This is not without consequence: the image of the project is easily stained and prejudices may lodge themselves. It is very likely that this will influence the course of and participation in the project, too. The project staff can do little to control the phenomenon.

The territorial management plan

After the selection of the information officer at the beginning of March 1996, silence set in as far as the PCGRN was concerned. It was not until the end of the month that a seminar for the management committee was held, during which the project objectives and the tasks and responsibilities of the management committee and of the project were explained. For this purpose, the project had hired ACA, a Senegalese NGO specialized in training, particularly in the field of financial management. The team was composed of several enthusiastic young Senegalese men, who instructed the group in a very active manner, putting the members of the management committee on joint exercises and making them find solutions by themselves. This proved to be very successful: after the seminar the members, who at first had hardly known for what purpose they had been appointed, had gained a much better idea of their job.

The population, however, were of the impression that nothing was happening at all. In conversations it emerged that people had already become rather discouraged. They started asking cynically whether anything concrete would indeed come about, or whether this was just another initiative announced with much fuss and noise, but never materializing, because the money has already vanished before it had started. People who had invested their money in establishing a GIE were obviously the bitterest ...

The project, however, prepared the draft of a territorial management plan, which was to serve as a reference for the financing of further project activities. The plan was to be developed by using MARP (*Méthode Accélérée des Recherches Participatives*),¹⁵ executed among the population with the help of the management committee. For the MARP exercise the PCGRN had called in the help of another NGO, ARDIS (*Association pour la Recherche du Développement Intégré au Sénégal*). A meeting of the committee was held with several ARDIS and PCGRN

representatives and the chief of the CERP. Three members of the management committee were chosen to assist in the MARP exercise, while six other members were charged with informing the population of the villages. Not all the villages could be visited and the management committee was therefore asked to make a representative selection of 13 villages. Although a degree of conflict arose among some of the members from different villages, who all wanted their village to be chosen, finally a choice was made that was also approved by the ARDIS team. Three weeks were available to elaborate the plans for the arrondissement: 5 days for each rural community and 6 days of evaluation. The team was to consist of 12 representatives from the rural communities (3 members per committee and the information officers), 6 members of the CERP and 15 of ARDIS staff. The undertaking had some urgency, because the rainy season was about to start and people would certainly have no time to attend once it had begun.

The public information team toured the community in the CERP car to prepare the people for the MARP. Although they were accompanied by a PCGRN employee, it was clearly an activity of their own; the representative of the craftsmen, who was of minstrel origin, proved to be a particularly enthusiastic and enthusing participant, using the megaphone placed at his disposal by the project with great flair.

Attendance in the villages was rather disappointing, however. At the meeting in Kaymor, for example, most of the people present kept their distance and played a waiting game.¹⁶ Those interested were mainly intellectuals, like the teachers and several educated youngsters, and several women. The older men, including most of the traditional elite, and the less educated youngsters stayed away or attended only in the background. K, who organized a village hearing in Kaymor to prepare for the arrival of the MARP team with a similarly disappointing small number of participants, sighed that it is very difficult to change the mentality of people who have always been told what to do without their opinion or their needs being asked.

The official village surveys started on June the 18th, 1996. Everywhere, the team visited the village chief first, while the population was gathered in the community area. With them a village history was reconstructed, while in the background leaders of various village committees and organizations were meanwhile interviewed (the women's club, the anti-bushfire committee, the health committee); the imam and the marabout were visited, too. Household surveys were held with the heads of several households, and with the aid of a group of villagers a village plan was drawn up. In the community area discussions focussed on such subjects as water and soil problems, knowledge about and use of trees, the agricultural calendar and differences between the past and the present.

At the end of the fourth day, finally, all 13 villages had been visited, and a final integration meeting was held in Kaymor for the entire rural community. The president of the management committee presented a list of the problems cited by the population. The fundamental problem to emerge was the availability of water. Additional problems mentioned were: salinization of the soils along the river, land shortage and soil degradation, bushfires, deforestation, termites, shortage of grazing lands, cattle infestation, the heavy workload of women and the presence of gullies. The solutions brought forward were: anti-erosion measures, dykes to stop salt infiltration, an improved water supply throughout the community by heightening the Kaymor water tower, fertilization of the soil by reforestation and natural and chemical fertilizers, revitalization of the anti-bushfire committees, stricter controls on deforestation, cattle-fattening, agricultural and horticultural development of the valley of Kaymor, and a lightening of the workload of women by introducing improved stoves, calor gas, millet mills and an improved water supply. With the promise of the ARDIS team that the findings would be laid down in a report as quickly as possible, so that they could be adopted by the management committee and the rural council, the meeting was closed.

After that, silence set in once more. In September 1996 a draft management plan was reviewed by several members of the management committee, but at the end of October there still was no final version to be presented to the rural council. For the farmers the rainy season was spent like any other. Sometimes someone would start talking about the project, asking when it was all going to really start. Scornful and jeering reactions would then silence him; life resumed its course.

By the end of 1996, the official management plan was finally ready. It contained a presentation of the MARP findings and an elaboration of options for improving the situation. The options were described under the following three headings:

- a. management of space and the sustainability of activities with respect to natural resource management;
- b. development of new activities while preserving the natural resources;
- c. promotion of activities to enhance the natural resource base or improve management thereof.

Under the first heading were placed such activities as the building of anti-salt dykes and economic development of the Baobolong, improvement of soil quality, agricultural and horticultural development of the valley of Kaymor, reforestation for multiple uses and promotion of fuel economy and road improvement. These activities are in fact infrastructural in nature, as they facilitate the other activities

under headings b and c. They impinge upon all the inhabitants of the community, and thus require focussing on by the entire population, supported by the CERP, the PCGRN, the Forestry Service and the like, possibly (co-)financed by other donors. Heading b comprised such actions as improving the water supply and revitalizing the water supply committees, cattle-breeding and the production and storage of cattle-fodder reserves. These activities were held to be particularly appropriate for execution by GIEs, women's groups and the like, and the population was told it was to these that requests for financial support should be submitted. Lastly, heading c covered the creation of credit facilities, reduction of women's workload, alphabetization, education and training. Some of the activities were to be financed by the project, while for others individuals or groups could file an application for financial support.

Indications for the future: enthusiasm, scepticism and the political factor

Unfortunately, in November 1996 I had to leave the field, so I could not follow further progress. In June 1997, however, I was given an opportunity to pay a short visit to Kaymor again. By that time, the PCGRN had entered the phase of selection of the subprojects to be financed. Of some 120 applications from throughout the community 51 had been selected; this number still had to be reduced to 30. Given this relatively high number of applications it may be concluded that despite the difficult launch of the project, it has begun to have an impact and has succeeded in catching people's interest. When I asked around, it appeared that most members of the management committee had remained enthusiastic, but that for the majority of the population the whole project seemed still further divorced from their everyday lives than the year before. After all, for them still nothing concrete had yet happened.

In addition, politics seemed to be dividing the spirits once more. In the elections for the rural council in November 1996, K, the man who had been eliminated by H in the management committee elections, had succeeded in becoming the new president of the rural council, thereby beating H, who had been the other candidate! This meant that while the management committee and the rural council should, properly speaking, complement one another, in fact the competitive character of their relationship had been strengthened by this development, owing to the competitive relationship between the two presidents. Conflicts heightened, which also meant that the followers of K became more critical of the project than ever, while the supporters of H stressed the project's expected blessings. For these

categories the project was certainly alive and real, but solely within the local political context.

It is evident that this new phase of the project in Kaymor leaves us with new questions as to its correspondence with the priorities of the local inhabitants and its ultimate impact on the perceived problems in the area. This will require further investigation of such questions as who submitted applications for support and for what activities, and a monitoring of the project over time to see who is gaining support and to assess results. For the time being, on the basis of what has been observed in the foregoing I shall conclude with some general remarks, as a provisional evaluation of the project's presence in Kaymor to date.

Conclusion

In retrospect it can be stated that the first meeting of the project with the population of Kaymor heralded a saga of miscommunication and failure. How the project actually developed, though, deserves a more nuanced judgement.

Initially, the project was given the benefit of the doubt by the local population. With their experience of former projects, people had generally come to adopt a sceptical attitude, but mainly because of the huge sums of money mentioned in connection with the project, people became more sympathetic. It must be said that the project staff gave broad information right from the start: not only were the amount of money and the fact that individual and collective subprojects would be financed mentioned; it was also stressed that in the end it was all about proper management of natural resources. What they did not realize, however, was that at that stage it was all too abstract for many people.¹⁷ What is more, they had not adequately recognized the danger of local politicians taking over information dissemination for their own benefit, to attract clients for example. Consequently, what was mainly remembered and disseminated was the news that a lot of money was on its way, while the idea of sustainable management of natural resources was pushed into the background.

The election of the management committee raises further questions about the political factor. The project staff considered the installation of the management committee an important step. The committee would serve as a countervailing power for the rural council, it was hoped, mirroring a new kind of democracy. Given the composition of the committee, it can be concluded that it was not a full-blown success in this respect. The president is still a representative of the political establishment and, what is more, someone mistrusted by nearly everyone; most of

the other board members are of the same political faction or can be considered his vasals. This raises the question whether real democracy, or even simply democratic management of natural resources, is possible in a socio-cultural context in which clientelistic relationships still predominate.

In this respect, the question arises whether the obligation to appoint two women to the committee in order to improve female involvement and say is in fact that useful. In this specific social context, whereby women are supposed to follow the men in public matters, it rather appears to give men an opportunity to strengthen their own position, by investing in women-vasals: a case in point is the relationship between the president of the management committee and the treasurer. Perhaps there must be a certain prior level of emancipation before this kind of policy can have any impact.

On the other hand, there are also people who by participating in the management committee now have a chance to have their voice heard, a chance they would not have otherwise had, or with much greater difficulty, because they are supporters of the opposition (the youth representative, the representative of zone 1), belong to a minor faction (the representative of zone 2) or because they are from an inferior caste (the representative of the craftsmen). They have in common that their level of education is above average.

The PCGRN not only has a strongly participative ideology, but also employs a number of people who really adhere to this philosophy and are willing to approach the local population as their equals. This was clearly reflected in the preparation of the management plan: responsibilities were delegated to local people and they were given scope to make mistakes and learn from them. What is more, the MARP proved to be a good method to improve people's insights into the environmental problems of the area and how the various phenomena are related. Initially, the president of the committee had hardly any idea of the interrelatedness of the problems, but after the MARP everything became much clearer to him; in addition, he was better able to express himself on these issues. The treasurer, too, gained a better understanding of what it was all about, and about her own problems, too. The fact that the villagers on the MARP teams had to visit the other villages of the community to hold interviews, made it all come alive to them and created a sense of solidarity: so you have that problem, too?

However, it can be queried whether a project so large in scope and ambition can be truly participatory. In the final analysis, for the local population the project remains a marginal affair, something imposed from outside, a package they can make use of or not, or only partially. Certainly in the case of such a huge undertaking as the PCGRN, the project cannot but be presented as a package – perhaps as a

'process in a package' or as 'packaged participation' – but still as a package. In fact, the rules are still fixed from above, as with the composition and mode of election of the management committee, and the plans, however much they are based on statements of the people themselves, are ultimately translated and formulated by project personnel. The project trajectory is also fixed at the Dakar headquarters. Local discontent about the fact that at the start of the rainy season in June 1996 still nothing concrete had happened proves that the time horizon of the policy-makers does not synchronize with that of the farmers. The farmers live from rainy season to rainy season; policy-makers count in budgetary years. Thus, a final question can be raised: is it possible to follow a participative process approach within such an extensive framework as the PCGRN, or does such an approach necessitate a really low-profile, small-scale context?

Nothing can yet be said on the final outcome of the PCGRN. There are certain indications that the project is not living up to its objectives of participation and partnership. On the other hand, certain positive aspects can also be mentioned, such as the fact that a management plan has indeed been made, that part of the population has been sensitized to the issues and is able and willing to participate, and that certain categories of people have, for the first time, had a chance to have their say via membership of the management committee. Much can still take a turn for better or for worse over the next three years. Until then, perhaps it is best to combine realistic optimism with a critical eye.

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NGOs and Environmental Dilemmas in Zimbabwe

Marleen Dekker and Ton Dietz

Introduction

All over the world Non-Governmental Organizations have become prominent agencies alongside, and sometimes in opposition to government agencies. Many of them claim to be more effective than governments in providing services, social security, development initiatives and empowerment. During the 1980s many existing NGOs became involved in 'environmental action', either as newly established 'environmental NGOs', or adapting to this rapidly expanding 'niche' and changing their objectives to include 'environment and development issues'. Both the activities around the Rio Conference in 1992 and the financial 'arguments' used by influential donors, who were strongly pushing the environmental agenda among NGOs, acted as catalysts in this respect. During the 1990s the phenomenon of the expanding role of NGOs in Africa has attracted a lot of scholarly attention, either as advocacy for an expanding role of NGOs (e.g. Riddell 1990, Mudenda 1991, Farrington *et al.* 1993) or very critical (e.g. Edwards and Hulme 1995, Smillie 1995, Sogge and Saxby 1996). While growing NGO involvement can be seen in 'environmental issues' in general, the experiences of 'environment and development' NGOs and their dilemmas warrant specific attention. Zimbabwe presents interesting case material. After its Independence in 1980 the country experienced a wild growth of all types of NGOs and soon a number of environmental NGOs became rather prominent, while a few of the radical empowerment NGOs became entangled in an uneasy embrace with issues of 'environmental sustainability' as well. To position these dilemmas we will first present a short description of Zimbabwe's environmental problems and of the 'Agenda 21' policies of the Zimbabwean government. This will be followed by a brief historical overview of the growth of Zimbabwean NGOs, zooming in on NGOs dealing with the environment. Finally we will discuss the major dilemmas confronting Zimbabwean NGOs when they focus their efforts on the environment.