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**Bridging the gap between bird conservation and sustainable development : perceptions and participation of rural people in Burkina Faso's Sahel region**

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## Who is in charge? The social interface of sustainable development actors and the local population in Burkina Faso

### Introduction

The ways decisions are taken is set by the (formal and informal) rules and meanings of the decision-making process (Engberg-Pedersen 2003; North 1990). North (1990) has described this as the concept of ‘institution’. “Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape interaction” (*Ibid.*: 3). Participants of decision-making processes prefer a set of rules that give them the most advantageous outcome, and disagreement among the actors can therefore arise regarding which institution to choose (Ostrom 2015). The actors’<sup>1</sup> interpretation and their ability to adapt ensures that there is no straightforward relationship between the rules and meanings and the decision-making. Nonetheless, a lack of correspondence between decision-making and rules does not mean that decision-making is free-floating; meanings and rules generally have a strong influence (Engberg-Pedersen 2003).

An encounter between individuals and groups belonging to different social systems, professions, or levels of social order have been described by Long (2001) as a ‘social interface’. Encounters at the interface can either take the form of struggles and conflicts or of agreements and fair collaboration. Conflicts commonly arise over access to resources, definitions of development, and the roles to be played by the various actors. The interface between the local populations and development actors often takes the form of struggles and conflicts as the two groups have different principles, knowledge, strategies, and ideologies. The groups are not homogeneous, however, and interests and strategies may or may not overlap (Engberg-Pedersen 2003).

Donors and development actors should be aware that interventions are not always taken at face value or exploited in accordance with their official goal. Bene-

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, an actor refers to either a person or an organization, depending on the context.

beneficiaries of projects may select what they find useful and use only particular elements of it, often for purposes other than originally intended. Occasionally, beneficiaries will do much, at least on the surface, to comply with project suggestions and requirements in order to obtain access to resources controlled by projects and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The willingness to create or retain local organizations at the behest of donors can be one reflection of this, as can the construction of token developments projects, such as school buildings and tree plantations. Potential beneficiaries sometimes give appropriate responses to any enquiry from donors and development actors and use appropriate language, including terms such as poverty alleviation, democracy, creating signs of harmony, collective action, participation, and so on, to attract and convince donors (Engberg-Pedersen 2003; Marcussen 1999; Michener 1998). In natural resource management (NRM), the accountability of all actors is critical. The use of multiple accountability methods, such as regularly auditing of projects, public access to information, and public display of financial expenditures, is therefore necessary, even with democratically elected (government) agencies, as elections are not sufficient to ensure accountability (Wangui Chomba 2015). Also, it is essential that NRM policies are debated, readjusted, and validated by stakeholder groups to enhance genuine local legitimacy (Diallo *et al.* 2012).

This chapter's objective is to increase insights into conservation and sustainable development interventions in Burkina Faso's Sahel region, in particular regarding the interaction between development agencies and local populations. The study includes the perceptions of a diverse and interlocked world of actors, with a focus on local inhabitants. It therefore uses an actor approach as opposed to a structural, institutional, and political economy analysis (Long 2001). It includes actor-defined issues such as unfair trade, unsustainable land-use, and declining biodiversity. The researched arena (see also Long 2001) is (global) decentralization policies in Burkina Faso. As such, it addresses the following research question:

*How does collaboration between development actors and the local population take place and how is it valued by the local population?*

This study focuses on sustainable rural development (including conservation) interventions and it supposes that local participation and empowerment are important aspects in these sectors. Mosse (2005, 2004) suggests that development workers have different ideas about such local collaboration than their organizations' policies prescribe. The former assumption and the latter suggestion are addressed in sub-question 1:

*How and to what extent is local collaboration propagated by development actors, including through their employees and mission statement?*

*Local collaboration in Africa*

In many African states community-based organizations, local governments, NGOs and African scholars have acquired a significant role in NRM. The environment and natural resources have always had a key position in African politics, and attention for environmental policies has further increased since African scholars and NGOs have gained more prominent positions in key development debates (Oyono & Ntungila-Nkama 2015; Coulibaly-Lingani *et al.* 2011; Fabricius & Koch 2004; Venema & Van den Breemer 1999; Shaw & Malcolm 1982). Local participation, empowerment and decentralization have been supported in NRM with the aim of increasing efficiency, benefitting the environment, and contributing to equity and rural development. As a result, conservation and development actors involved local populations in their projects (Roe *et al.* 2006; Ribot 2003; Gray 2002; Ribot 1999; Brosius *et al.* 1998). The participation of local communities “can be used as a basis for the modification of the design of a project, programme or policy in order to make it more acceptable and more effective in achieving the objectives and priorities of communities” (Sumner & Tribe 2008: 143).

Thomas (2013) indicates that international conservation organizations have established global conservation priorities and have been criticized for setting an agenda that does not take local conditions and priorities into account. In Sub-Saharan Africa, existing local organizations have been overlooked by development actors and, apparently, little attention has been paid to the diverse interests among different social groups, leaders, and non-leaders (Ribot 2003; Benjaminson 2000). A recent series of papers from the *Responsive Forest Governance Initiative* demonstrates the importance of knowing how to include local stakeholders – and which ones – in project phases, for both conservation and socio-political purposes (see also IUCN 2015). For example, Dem Samb (2015) demonstrates that working with women exclusively (e.g. for gender equity purposes) can lead to a negative perception of both the project and NRM in general. Based on an NRM project in Senegal, she shows that this gender policy affected the democratization of NRM since the other social groups (men and youth) felt excluded. As a consequence, gender equity issues amplified in the community and men disengaged from conservation activities in general (Dem Samb 2015). In another example, based on studies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria, respectively, Oyono & Ntungila-Nkama (2015) and Nuesiri (2015), argue that conservation and NRM can only be sustainable when they promote local representation and democracy. This way, local inhabitants feel represented in, and connected to the project (Nuesiri 2015; Oyono & Ntungila-Nkama 2015).

Generally, in African states customary authority is still in place, giving influential but unelected people power. This can undermine the representation of the locally elected government officials (Nuesiri 2012). Therefore, local representation should not only be by elites, i.e. influential people, but also by means of democratically elected local government agencies (Nuesiri 2015; Oyono & Ntungila-Nkama 2015). In an extension of these studies, and based on an NRM project study in Kenya, Wangui Chomba (2015) indicates that projects should only include community organizations that are under the presidency of elected local governments, so that decisions are kept within the realm of local government. Communities involved could learn critical lessons on how to address their needs through elected leaders.

#### *Local collaboration in Burkina Faso*

According to some scholars (Cleary 2003; Donnelly-Roark *et al* 2001), local populations in Burkina Faso moved from merely passive beneficiaries of development projects to partner positions in locally based development, principally since the country's *Decentralization Law* of 1998. However, it remained unclear what the role of the local communities was (Ribot 2003; Benjaminsen 2000). The government in Burkina Faso arguably devolved insufficient powers and benefits, either to constitute a decentralization or to motivate local actors to carry out new management responsibilities (Ribot 2003). Burkina Faso has informally recognized community-based organizations for a long time, but only since this decentralization law have they been formally integrated into the legal, economic, and institutional framework of decentralization. The country now has a large number of community organizations (Van den Bergh 2014; Cleary 2003; Donnelly-Roark *et al.* 2001). The communities' role in NRM depends a lot on the negotiation power of individual local organizations (Ribot 2003; Benjaminsen 2000). Whether the transfer of NRM to these organizations promotes or undermines representative, accountable, and equitable processes depends strongly on which local actors are being entrusted with resource control (Ribot 2003).

As part of its decentralization policy, Burkina Faso has a decentralized administration that includes a locally elected administration and a centrally appointed administration (Figure 5.1). The administration officers of the former structure are directly elected by the local inhabitants, while for the latter they are appointed by the central government (Consulat Général du Burkina Faso à Paris 2015; Coulibaly-Lingani *et al.* 2011). According to Mathieu *et al.* (2002), as far as land and NRM is concerned, customary authorities have lost influence since the *1984 Land Reform Act* as this act defines the entire rural land as national domain. However, in her paper on local governance institution for NRM in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, Hilhorst (2008) argues that customary authority continues to

play an important role in NRM, especially in remote areas where government presence is more limited. Furthermore, for the locally-elected administration, local populations often elect former traditional chiefs (i.e. customary authorities; Boukari Ouédraogo, communication officer of *Inades-Formation Burkina-Faso, pers comm.*, March 2014). Coulibaly-Lingani *et al.* (2011) indicate that conflicts over decision-making power have arisen between the many actors, including the central government, local elected officers, customary authority and community organizations. In addition, the contemporary development and conservation domains in Burkina Faso are also strongly influenced by many national and international organizations, such as donor, research, and development organizations, including many (international) NGOs (Engberg-Pedersen 2003; Enée 2010; SP/CONAGESE 1999).

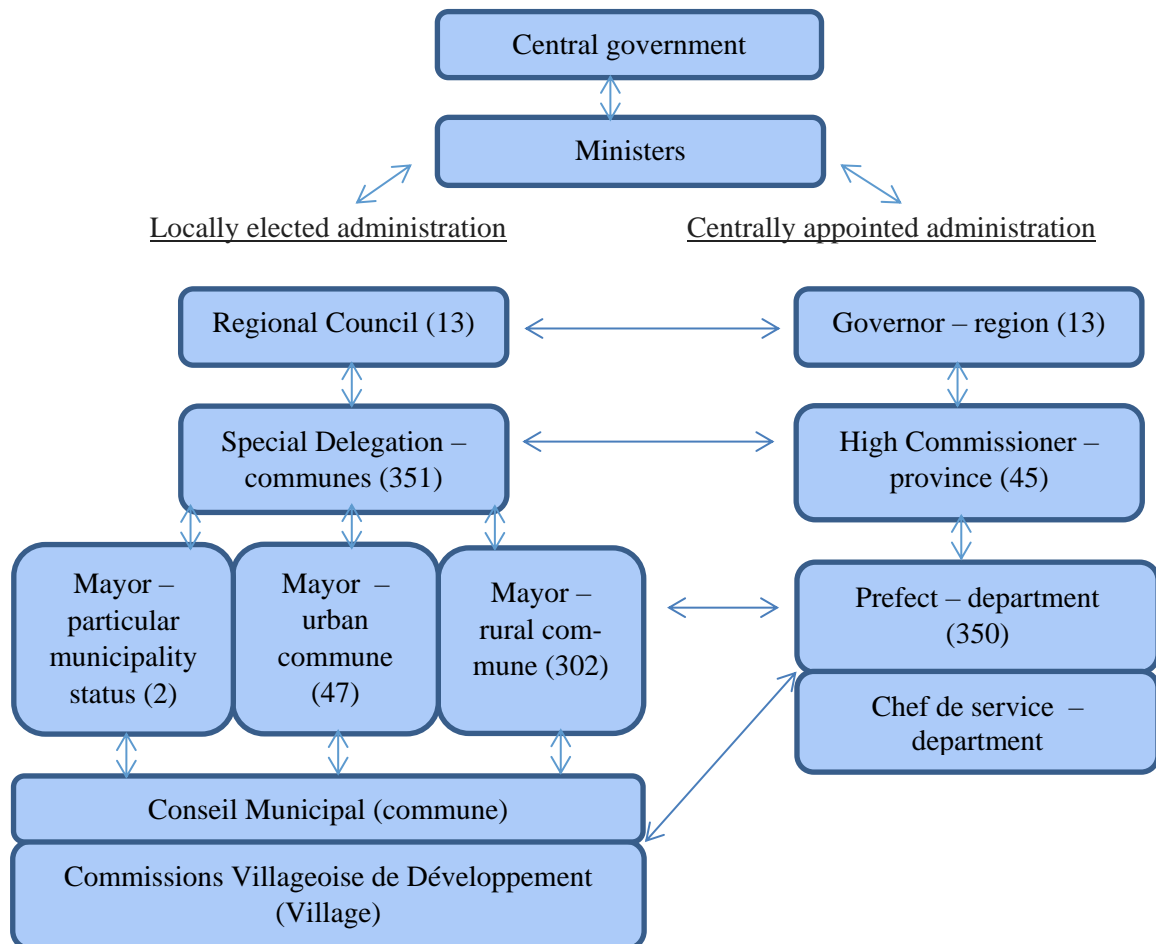
At the village level, following the establishment of elected local governments in 2006, *Commissions Villageoise de Développement* were installed in 2007. These councils act as intermediates between the local population and the local government and are intended to contribute to development and the implementation of communal plans. Each council consists of 12 members, including two who are responsible for land issues and NRM, including forestry. The composition of these commissions should be a representation of village interests; they are elected by the local population (Coulibaly-Lingani *et al.* 2011; Hilhorst 2008). One administrative level higher, at the commune<sup>2</sup> level, the *Conseil Municipal* acts as the representative council for the local community. The council consists of locally elected members from each village in the commune: two *Conseil Municipal* members for a village with less than 5,000 inhabitants, and three *Conseil Municipal* members for a village with more than 5,000 inhabitants. The council members elect the mayor from among their members, who acts as head of the council (Coulibaly-Lingani *et al.* 2011; Zougouri Abdoul, member *Conseil Municipal, pers. comm.* December 2011; Tindano Hamado, Mayor, *pers. comm.* August 2011). The Mayor is the head of the communal administration. As such, it administrates all communal business and organizes industrial, commercial, and administrative services in order to promote and safeguard the public and private interests of the commune (Burkina Faso 2004). The prefect is the head of the departmental administration. As such, he or she is in charge of national interests, law enforcement, public order, and public safety. He/she ensures the implementation of regulations and decisions in the department. The *Chef de Service* is the head of the ministries' technical services at the department level, and include, for example, the *Chef de Service Départemental de l'Environnement et de Développement Durable*. As such, they are in command of their sector in accord-

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<sup>2</sup> "A 'commune rurale' usually incorporates a number of other towns or villages as well as the principal town of the area" (Rupley *et al.* 2013: 41)

ance with existing regulations. Officially, they fall under the authority of the High Commissioner, but they are coordinated and controlled by the prefect (Presidential decree 2013 & 2012).

Figure 5.1 Organization of Burkina Faso's territorial administration



Source: Consulat Général du Burkina Faso à Paris (2015); Boukari Ouédraogo, communication officer of Inades-Formation Burkina-Faso, *pers. comm.* March 2014; Coulibaly-Lingani *et al.* (2011).

The current study explores the interface between local populations and development actors in Burkina Faso. The study does not focus on conditions, context, and ‘driving forces’, rather, it explores actor-defined issues and events, decision-making processes, and the networks and relationships of actors. It is not so much about differences within sectors and between development actors, but more about general patterns between said actors and the local population. Distinctions between different development actors are therefore often not explicitly named. In this way, the study addresses sub-questions 2:



*How do development actors and the local population perceive their collaboration?*

Understanding the negotiation processes and the different roles played by the different actors is important because “the notion of negotiation is essential in the setting up of ‘sustainable’ relations between the different types of users and the environment” (Raynaut 2001: 18-19). Ribot (2003) and Benjaminsen (2000) argue that negotiation power is an important element in natural resource management. This leads us to sub-question 3:

*Does the social interface occur in the form of struggles and conflicts or of agreement and fair collaboration; who is in charge of the negotiation process?*

## Methods

### *Study areas*

Field research was conducted between July and September 2011; December 2011 and March 2012; in February/March 2013; between February and April 2014; and again in April 2015. The study areas included two rural research areas – Sourou valley (hereafter referred to as Sourou) and Lac Higa (hereafter referred to as Higa). Sourou (ca. 22,000 ha) is in both Lanfiera Department (12 communities) and Di Department (13 communities) in Sourou Province, in the northern part of the Sudanian biome near Burkina Faso’s north-western border with Mali. Higa (ca. 1500 ha) is in Tankougounadié Department (13 communities) in Yagha Province, on the southern edge of the Sahel biome near Burkina Faso’s north-eastern border with Niger (Ramsar 2013; Fishpool & Evans 2001; Figure 1.4). The two areas differ in many ways (see Van den Bergh 2014). Most institutions that were included in this study were based in two of Burkina Faso’s main urban areas – the country’s capital Ouagadougou and the country’s second largest city Bobo-Dioulasso. On some occasions, depending on the actors’ activities and office locations, research was conducted outside these areas.

### *Website examination*

An examination of the development actors’ websites provided useful information on local collaboration policies (see also Ybema *et al.* 2009). The mission statements (or equivalent section) on the websites of thirty development actors were examined for references to local involvement and, specifically, references to decentralization, participation and empowerment (policies) (Annex 5.1, and Tables 5.1 and 5.2).

### Interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were held with the local population and with development actors. Among the local population were (board) members of community organizations (COs), community and religious leaders, and semi-randomly<sup>3</sup> selected local inhabitants. Among the development actors were government officials, NGO staff, bioagricultural and social business employees (Annex 5.1, Tables 5.1 and 5.2). In total, 88 interviews were conducted, 60 with development actors and 28 with local inhabitants. The semi-structured style provided a systematic approach while still allowing freedom in the sequencing of questions, and in the amount of time and attention paid to each particular question. Some questions proved to be unsuitable for particular interviewees, while additional questions were included when needed (see also Robson 2002). In addition, some freedom was given to the interviewees regarding the exact discussion topic. The purpose of this interview style was to bring unknown issues to light and to discover what the interviewees perceive to be important issues and topics.

*Table 5.1* Development actors: research numbers and abbreviation

Development actors	National	International (I)	Abbreviation
Government (department)	3	3	(I)GO
Non-governmental organization	2	14	(I)NGO
Research institute	3	1	(I)RI
Business	2	2	(I)BS
Total	10	20	30

*Table 5.2* Local population: details and number of interviewees

Local population	Details	N.
(Board) members of 6 community organizations	e.g. farming and conservation organizations	6
Village representatives	e.g. village development councils and Mayor	12
Religious leaders	e.g. imam and pastor	4
(Non-affiliated) individuals	e.g. farmers, herders and fishermen	6
Total		28 interviewees

<sup>3</sup> Semi-randomly selected local inhabitants refers to a selection of the local population that aims at representing the diversity found among the population, and particularly regarding people's occupation (i.e. land use activities). The selection was made by approaching inhabitants in their homes or fields, on the road, or at local markets. For more details, see Chapter 1, the section on 'Research methods'.

### *PADev in Sourou*

PADev (Participatory Assessment of Development) is a participatory and holistic methodology for evaluating development interventions. Information about changes in six domains (natural, physical, human, economic, socio-political, cultural) and the impact of interventions is gathered in workshops in which all layers of the local society participate (Dietz & the PAdDev team 2013).

In Sourou, 15 PAdDev-inspired focus workshops were held in 2015 with 33 participants, divided into nine individual and six group (2-6 persons) workshops. Due to security concerns in Higa in (at least) 2014-15 it was decided to not organize any PAdDev-inspired focus workshops in the area.<sup>4</sup> Workshop participants included board members of six COs (including three women-only groups), four religious leaders (all male), and eight semi-randomly selected inhabitants (3 women). Altogether, the participants discussed and rated 11 projects from 8 actors, most of which were discussed in more than one workshop (Table 5.3). The focus in these workshops was on the PAdDev ‘assessment of actors’ exercise, which was used to discover participant’s perceptions of interventions and the actors working in the area. In the PAdDev-inspired exercise, participants were asked to assess the actors working in the area based on various statements:

- a) The actor is committed to us in the long term
- b) The actor doesn’t promise more than they can deliver
- c) When something goes wrong they tell us honestly
- d) The actor addresses the problems that affect us
- e) We have a voice in the type of projects the actor does and how projects are done
- f) The actor staff live among us

These statements are considered criteria in this study, namely: ‘long term engagement’; ‘realistic expectation’; ‘honesty’; ‘relevance’<sup>5</sup>; ‘participation’; and ‘local presence’, respectively.

It has been observed that “exercises employing the use of stones generated a lot of discussion and engagement among participants because there was an element of ‘fun’ about them” (Dietz & the PAdDev team 2013: 18). This exercise type was adapted to maximize the input of all participants. The group was given 30 stones and was asked to score each criterion by placing between 1-5 stones at each criterion listed on a sheet of A1 paper (see Photos 1.4-1.6). The participants respond to the statements by indicating either that they apply ‘very much so’ (5 stones); ‘much so’ (4 stones); ‘neutral’ (3 stones); ‘not so much’ (2 stones); or

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<sup>4</sup> For similar reasons, Achille Ouédraogo, a biology Master’s student at the University of Ouagadougou conducted the PAdDev-type exercises in Sourou in April 2015 (that is after he had already acted as my research assistant).

<sup>5</sup> Generally locally regarded as a synonym for effectiveness.

‘not at all’ (1 stone). Participants discussed the number of stones for each criterion until consensus was reached within the group.<sup>6</sup>

*Table 5.3* ‘PADev’ research numbers by type of actor

Type of actor	Number of actors	Number of projects	Number of workshops <sup>1</sup>	Number of participants <sup>1</sup>
GO	2	4	4	7
IGO	2	3	10	28
NGO	3	3	4	7
INGO	1	1	2	2
Total	8	11	20 (15)	44 (33)

Note 1: The total number of workshops held was 15, and these included 33 participants. However, several actors and their projects were included in more than one workshop, and as a result a higher total is calculated for the number of workshops and participants, namely 20 and 44, respectively.

### *Participant observations*

Participant observations, in which ‘first-hand’ experience and exploration were key, were garnered from 22 negotiation processes and other interactions between local inhabitants and development actors, namely: one NGO (*NATURAMA*); two INGOs (*Vogelbescherming Nederland* and *BirdLife International*); one IBS (*BioVisio*); one GO (*La Direction Générale des Eaux et Forêts*); and one IGO (*GIZ*). These interactions lasted between 30 minutes to three days, and included stakeholder meetings, joint project activities, job trainings, and policy, project, and sales negotiations (Ybema *et al.* 2009). The purpose of these observations was to determine which actors lead and direct the conversation, do most of the talking, and to what extent they speak freely and give their opinion.

### Results

#### *Development actors’ mission statements and references to local collaboration*

All 30 development actors (DAs), except for one (government actor), referred to local involvement in some way<sup>7</sup> on their websites’ mission statement (or similar

<sup>6</sup> According to the PAdDev methods, participants should respond to the statements by indicating either that they apply ‘always’, ‘usually’, ‘sometimes’, ‘usually not’, or ‘never’, and in that way provide each criterion with a score from 5 (‘always’) to 1 (‘never’). In this study, these scores were often taken as a way of grading, and following their responses could generally better be interpreted as ‘very much so’, ‘much so’, ‘neutral’, ‘not so much’, and ‘not at all’.

<sup>7</sup> Including by referring to: capacity building; engagement; self-sufficiency; autonomy; partnership; collaboration; and cooperation in a local context.

section<sup>8</sup>), either prominently (16; e.g. we support initiatives of local organizations, we ourselves do not start projects), or less explicitly (13; e.g. engaging with local providers in the future). The latter category included mainly national actors and, more specifically, mostly research and government actors. Almost half (14) of the 30 DAs referred to ‘participation’ (6), ‘empowerment’ (4), ‘decentralization’ (3), or all three (1) in a local context (Table 5.4). The national actors’ focus was on decentralization, while the international actors put more emphasis on empowerment and participation.

### *Development actors’ perception of local collaboration*

Local actors were usually not mentioned in the interviews among the DAs’ collaboration partners, but instead only cited after having specifically asked about local, on the ground, collaboration partners. Nonetheless, the respondents of the majority (22) of the 30 organizations indicated having strong local partnerships. Although the employees of INGOs placed the most emphasis on the collaboration with local actors, the intensity of collaboration varied, especially between projects and between comparable DAs. In addition, on some occasions it also depended on individual interpretation, experience, and explanation, as they sometimes differed between employees of the same organization, and thus on who was interviewed within the organization. Statements on the collaboration type varied from a bottom-up design approach, in which the locals largely design and implement the project, to a more top-down approach. In the latter approach, the DA is in control and designs the project (sometimes in discussion with locals, but the discussion results are not always incorporated in the project design), which is implemented with ‘only’ the help of local community members (providing them with little freedom and flexibility). Because DAs earn more respect and have more authority than the local population, it was suggested that certain social and political project aspects are easier arranged by them. Several DAs have suggested that the local participation level depended largely on financial benefits (e.g. from NTFPs, trophy hunting, and tourism), which increased with increased revenues.

The respondents described several ways to approach and collaborate with local communities, including organizing community meetings in which all community members are invited or in which the inhabitants are represented by the Mayor and/or the Prefect, or by the *Conseil Villageois de Développement* and/or *Conseil Municipal*. Other common ways are by approaching existing COs and through

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<sup>8</sup> Including: vision; objectives; commitment; corporate responsibility; values; mandate; philosophy; policies; goal; about us; mandate; and presentation.

Table 5.4 Development actors: Type, sector and mission

Actor	Type <sup>1</sup>	Sector (principal) <sup>2</sup>	Mission <sup>3</sup>
Ministère de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable (Générale)	GO	Cons./Dev.	x
Ministère de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable (La Direction Générale des Eaux et Forêts)	GO	Conservation	x
AMVS	GO	Development	x
PNUD/UNDP	IGO	Development	2
CILSS	IGO	Development	x
GIZ (GIZ FAFASO)	IGO	Development	1, 2 & 3
<i>NATURAMA</i>	NGO	Conservation	x
ONG AGED Burkina Faso	NGO	Development	x
Autre Terre (Burkina Faso)	(I)NGO	Development	3
IUCN (Burkina Faso)	(I)NGO	Conservation	3
Eau Vive (Burkina Faso)	(I)NGO	Development	x
Oxfam International (Burkina Faso)	(I)NGO	Development	x
Christian Aid (Burkina Faso)	(I)NGO	Development	2
Diobass (Burkina Faso)	(I)NGO	Development	x
SNV (Burkina Faso)	(I)NGO	Development	2
CIRAD (Burkina Faso)	(I)NGO	Development	x
<i>BirdLife International</i>	INGO	Conservation	2
<i>Vogelbescherming Nederland</i>	INGO	Conservation	x
Marie Stopes International	INGO	Development	x
Broederlijk Delen	INGO	Development	x
Thamani	INGO	Development	3
L'Orange Bleue Afrique	INGO	Development	3
INERA Institut de l'Environnement et Recherches Agricoles	RI	Cons./Dev.	1
Université de Ouagadougou	RI	Cons./Dev.	3
Université Polytechnique de Bobo-Dioulasso	RI	Cons./Dev.	1
CIFOR	IRI	Cons./Dev.	x
Gebana Afrique	(I)BS	Development	x
Anatrans	(I)BS	Development	x
Biovisio	IBS	Development	x
Roxgold	IBS	Development	3

Note 1: The type of actor involved: some international actors have a national branch with a distinct structure and mission, these are indicated with an 'I' between brackets.

Note 2: The principal sector in which the actor is active: the development orientated actors were partially selected on the basis that they also have some conservation and/or environmental activities and/or objectives.

Note 3: his column shows whether, and which one of the following terms are used in the actor's mission (or similar) statement on their websites: (1) 'decentralization'; (2) 'empowerment'; (3) 'participation'; (x) 'no reference to these terms'.

known individuals, such as informants and ‘local capacity builders’ (a local ‘middleman’ is often used as a strategy for long-term sustainability and reduced salary and travel costs). The DAs frequently indicated that they always inform the Mayor and/or Prefect on their (planned) activities in the area. Frequently, the DAs were also approached by the local inhabitants themselves, including by those looking for long-term partnership arrangements. Having a local office was an important part of the philosophy of some DAs as well as a strategy of decentralization and local participation. In contrast, one INGO reasoned that they do not want to keep money in their own organization and therefore outsource activities to local organizations. Those DAs that collaborate on a project basis (and thus not structurally) do not usually have a regional or local office.

In general, the major collaboration partners at the local level were the COs and more than half (18) of the organizations collaborated with them. Collaboration with COs was particularly common among INGOs (12 out of 14). While some DAs collaborated only with existing COs, others stimulated and/or helped to found new COs for collaboration.<sup>9</sup> For some DAs, the foundation of COs was a development objective in itself (and they retreat when the CO functions well). One (I)NGO indicated that, in response to their presence, COs have been formed by inhabitants in the hope that it increases their chance of a collaboration partnership.

Collaboration was especially common with COs with an organized structure, including a management board. Collaboration usually happens via the CO’s board members, especially with the secretary (the president is usually the person with status and good networks,<sup>10</sup> while the secretary is usually the person with vision and plans). As commonly argued by DAs, by working with CO leaders, a broader range of inhabitants is involved through the participation of its members, thereby expanding the reach of activities. Businesses have indicated that this is one of their main reasons for wanting to work with COs (and especially with the bigger unions, i.e. a federation of COs), as it is the large number of members that makes it commercially attractive. For this reason, DAs – and especially the businesses interviewed – occasionally unite COs into unions for scaling purposes. Another method of collaboration is hiring a local representative, a so-called middleman, who acts as an intermediary between the DA and the CO. On occasions when a DA employee visits the local area, he or she often organizes a meeting with all members for collaboration purposes.

Some of the disadvantages raised by DAs on CO collaboration included the COs’ unclear objectives, accountancy issues, limited discipline of their members,

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed account on the foundation process of two COs in Higa and Sourou, see Van den Bergh (2014).

<sup>10</sup> According to one INGO, “the key thing of local collaboration is having many contacts.”

and limited resources and capacity. The latter included limited time available for CO activities as all other subsistence livelihood activities continue, such as farming and herding. Also, partnership building is a long process that requires much time, according to the DAs. In general, DAs argued that the advantages of CO collaboration outweigh the disadvantages, for both themselves and the local communities. Some DAs expressed their satisfaction towards proper information exchange<sup>11</sup> and punctual meeting times, and argued that working with COs improves the quality of the work through checks and balances. DAs often provide a wide range of training, education (primarily literacy lessons), offer allowances, and contribute to capacity building. Furthermore, COs provide a platform that enables the inhabitants' economic and political power.<sup>12</sup> One INGO claimed that the government does not want farmers to have too much power. Nonetheless, it was found that some government actors did collaborate closely with COs.

The second major local collaboration partner were government actors. Nonetheless, they were less often a collaboration partner at the local level than at national level; namely, almost one third (9) of the DAs at the local level compared to more than two thirds (21) of the DAs at the national level. Some DAs (4) pointed at the responsibility of the government regarding local participation and its decentralization policy, and therefore work through local governments locally. In their view, local governments should lead and be in charge of the project, while the local community should be the one implementing it. To increase its efficiency, capacity building of local governments is often part of the DA's collaboration strategy. Two (I)BS' raised a problem with involving the government, namely that each government official wants a share of the benefits. Also, government officials usually use a more top-down approach, according to one IGO.

The third major local collaboration partners were community representatives, including the *Conseil Municipal*, *Conseil Villageois de Développement*, and the Mayor.<sup>13</sup> Collaboration with the Mayor was generally considered more important than with the Prefect, but both were often included to prevent conflicts. According to one business organization (IBS), the political power of the Prefects has been decreasing since the country's decentralization policies, while that of the Mayor has been increasing. Nonetheless, three INGOs still collaborated very little with the Mayor compared with the Prefect (apparently because of existing links). It was also suggested by (I)NGO employees that the Mayor and Prefect

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<sup>11</sup> One IBS indicated that local inhabitants keep most information to themselves, which gives them the advantage of having information that others do not have.

<sup>12</sup> According to one (I)BS, mutual contracts are sometimes used so that no one has absolute control and power, and local authorities can interfere when needed.

<sup>13</sup> Some (4) agencies considered the Mayor as a local government agent, but because the Mayor is elected by the community it is considered a community representative in this study.



should decide who will be in charge of the project. In some cases they jointly dealt with the project.

Notably, none of the organizations mentioned religious or influential (non-elected) leaders, or households among the collaboration partners, but a few did mention collaboration with (non-affiliated) individuals (2), customary authority (1; primarily chiefs), and schoolteachers (1). Some organizations worked at local (project implementation) level together with national NGOs, but they did not consider them local partners as their office was based in one of the country's urban areas. According to one INGO, NGOs take less initiative than COs, and are often passive and show more financial dependence towards INGOs (described by the INGO as 'showing begging features').

#### *Perceptions of local collaboration in Sourou*

Thirty-seven local inhabitants were approached for the PADev-inspired workshops in Sourou, but three men and one woman did not know of any development or conservation project or had only heard of a project without knowing more than the name. The remaining 33 participants mentioned 8 actors and 11 of their projects in total. Among the actors were national and international governments (2 GOs and 2 IGOs), and national and international NGOs (3 NGOs and 1 INGO). As for the projects, the IGO ones were the most widely known and most familiar to many participants. For that reason, these were assessed by many participants, and their PADev-type ratings are therefore the most reliable. In particular, the women tended to know very little about the actors and projects, because, according to the women, "it's the husbands who go to get help from the projects."

Overall, the 11 projects were reviewed 'positively', namely  $\geq 2.50$ , with an average of 3.39 on a scale of 1 to 5 (Table 5.5). However, one (GO) project received an average score of 2.17 by its only workshop participant. One INGO project was also reviewed negatively by one participant (also 2.17), but more positively by another participant (3.67; which gives the project an average of 2.92). These two projects scored particularly low on 'long term engagement', 'realistic expectation', and 'relevance'.<sup>14</sup> The other projects were judged similarly between participants, e.g. one IGO project was judged in 9 exercises (by 23 participants in total) and the overall scores varied by a maximum of 1 point (3.17 - 4.17). However, different projects by the same actors varied considerably, e.g. two GO projects (grants project; 2.17 versus fish transformation project; 4.50). On average, women gave higher scores (3.60) than men (3.21).

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<sup>14</sup> These exceptions did not influence the overall outcome (i.e. statistics) markedly and are included in the analysis.

When one looks at the average criterion scores of all actors together, the criterion ‘local presence’ stands out as scoring markedly lower than the other five criteria. This criterion received the score 4 (both NGOs) only twice, and never the score 5. At the other extreme, the criterion ‘relevance’ only scored 1 once, and 2 twice. The smallest variation between the actor groups (meaning each actor group scored ‘notably’ different from the average) was within the criterion ‘honesty’ (all  $\leq 0.30$  from average), and the largest variation was within the criterion ‘relevance’ (all  $\geq 0.50$  from average), although the criterion ‘long-term engagement’ had the two largest extremes in relation to its average.

*Table 5.5* Assessment of development actors’ projects<sup>1</sup>

Actor type <sup>2</sup>	local presence	participation	Long t. engagement	realistic expectation	honesty	relevance	Average
GO	2.50	2.75	4.25	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.33
IGO	2.00	3.50	3.50	3.90	3.70	4.60	3.53
NGO	3.00	3.00	3.50	3.25	3.75	3.50	3.33
INGO	3.00	2.50	2.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	2.92
Average <sup>3</sup>	2.40	3.15	3.50	3.60	3.70	4.00	3.39

Note 1: No (I)BSs and RIs projects were included as the ‘PADev’ participants were unaware of any.

Note 2: See Table 5.3 for the number of actors, projects, workshops and participant per actor type.

Note 3: The averages are based on the total of the 11 project scores per criterion.

Collaboration between actors and local inhabitants was discussed in detail with 28 inhabitants (see Table 5.2), including 6 workshop participants and 22 additional interviewees. According to the vast majority (24), decisions were made by the actors. Only four respondents indicated that they had a key role in decision-making.

The main perceived weakness of collaboration with development actors was that they do not deliver what they had promised (8). Indeed, many respondents expressed a wish for development actors to keep their promises (10) and for projects to be more realistic (5). Other weaknesses concerned, in descending order of importance, financial matters (dishonesty, no allowances), the short time span of projects, and lack of activities, information, communication, and motivation. On the other hand, five respondents did not note any weaknesses.

The DAs’ understanding of the inhabitants (13) was the major perceived strength, followed by the grants they provided (7). These two are followed by: punctuality during meetings; motivation of actors; employment within the actor; provisions of tools (including ovens); provision of training; no discrimination (treating all religions the same); improved agricultural crops; honesty; dialogue;

obedience of people to leaders; and the regular organization of meetings. Only three respondents could not come up with any strength.

Suggestions for improvement in collaboration included allowing inhabitants to have more input in meetings (8); increasing the duration of projects (6); and direct collaboration between DA and local population (rather than indirect collaboration via a 'local' middleman who is chosen and paid for by the DA, partly because these middlemen mostly help, and collaborate with, their friends and family) (5). Other suggestions included, in descending order of importance, providing enough resources (tools) to be able to continue the project activities when the actor pulls out; building on good relationships; helping with essentials such as food, medicine and clean drinking water; and increasing credit loans.

#### *Observations of interactions and local participation*

Typically, individual characteristics, such as personality (e.g. authoritarian or not), gender, authority/function (e.g. career background), seniority and experience/skill level, played a key role in determining who was leading and directing the conversation and/or was talking the most. For example, an experienced and authoritarian senior male who was head of an organization was most likely to lead the conversation. On two occasions, the nature of interaction appeared to be the decisive factor, e.g. in one case, one of the actors was the customer and therefore the one with 'negotiation power'. No clear relation was found/noticed between development actors and local inhabitants. Still, the development actors led the conversation slightly more often, and were also more likely to speak more often. In general, no signs were noticed that participants could not speak freely or give their opinion;<sup>15</sup> instead, during most interactions the opposite was noticed, with the exception of women. During four interactions women were clearly more introvert and seemingly reluctant to interact freely. The male participants focused more on the male participants by, e.g., eye contact and directing questions to them. This was confirmed by some women. A male development actor acknowledged that this is often the case (but also indicated that women are appreciated for not involving themselves in political games and relations). Lastly, nepotism was noticed on one occasion when a law enforcement officer witnessed some (minor) law-breaking by some local inhabitants with whom he had become friends having relocated to the area two years before. He assessed the offence less strictly than he did with those with whom he did not have a personal relationship.

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<sup>15</sup> One should be aware of the potential influence of my presence during these processes, which might stimulate, what is thought to be, appropriate negotiation behaviour. However, due to my often extended stay with the participants my presence was less emphatic in the negotiation processes and the processes appeared to go naturally.

Several proactive initiatives by local actors were noticed, including the planning of new activities by COs, although the long-term agenda was provided by a DA. The CO board members were particularly proactive, while the members usually showed passiveness in meetings but were more active, interested, and involved (including providing input) during project activities. The development actors regularly participated in the project implementation and often acted in the same way as the local inhabitants, in order to help and/or teach the community members. Issues of miscommunication were noticed on several occasions. This appeared to be a result of differences in education level and professional background (e.g. local inhabitants were not familiar with professional jargon). In some cases, the development actor provided a brighter picture of the projects' local participation than it was in reality. The same applied to claims that the local community continued the project fully independently. On at least two of these occasions, the local actors indicated that they were still supported, with resources, but also occasionally financially. A recurring aspect was the local actors' request for resources (equipment, but also office buildings). On at least one occasion, fraud was noticed when a CO demanded an excessive and false expense allowance from a DA. Similar practices were also noticed by the DAs, and it was suggested that local actors need to receive training on (financial) responsibility. In this way, they will be accountable for their own (financial) mistakes, which stimulates financial efficiency and accuracy. It also reduces corruption, as fraud is allegedly less likely to occur among peers (i.e. local actors), due to personal and family relations, than among local actors and outsiders (i.e. DAs).

## Discussion

Local collaboration appeared to be an important component of the conservation and development organizations' mission statements, commonly including decentralization, empowerment, and particularly local participation. Although the perceptions of the employees of these organizations confirmed this type of policy, their interpretation varied, also within a single organization. The majority of the selected local inhabitants were familiar with at least one DA and were involved in one or more of the DAs' projects and activities.

Indeed, collaboration between DAs and local communities was common and appeared extensive in many cases. Local collaboration was most common between DAs and COs. This type of collaboration was especially valued by DAs because it meant that many people (i.e. CO members) could be reached through collaboration with a limited selection of people (i.e. CO board members). It has been suggested by DAs that as many people as possible should be involved in community collaboration to prevent conflicts, but one INGO warned that, in par-

ticular, the poorest inhabitants are not members of any CO, and they will thus automatically be excluded from these collaboration partnerships. The creation and retention of COs, including their many tree planting activities (see Van den Bergh 2014), suggests that local populations did much to comply with project suggestions and requirements, arguably in order to obtain access to resources controlled by projects and NGOs (see also Michener 1998; Marcussen 1999; Engberg-Pedersen 2003). An employee from an RI argued that there were now too many COs, creating too much overlap and conflicts.

Even though local collaboration was widespread, local communities were usually not listed among the DAs' collaboration partners. This arguably shows that local inhabitants are not seen as full partners. Indeed, it was sometimes indicated that the local 'partners' were merely those who implemented the projects. Although genuine participation in project design was also observed, it was usually restricted to the board members of COs. Local inhabitants often indicated having no role in the decision-making process, and many of them wished to have more input in meetings. Similarly, the PADev criterion 'participation' scored below the average of all criteria combined. Nonetheless, observations of interactions, including negotiation processes, showed a fairly equal power relationship between development actors and local inhabitants. These local inhabitants usually included a select group, however, such as the board members of COs. Based on extensive PADev-type research in Ghana and Burkina Faso, Dietz & the PADev team (2013) note that top-down development aid without consultation is considered bad aid by the local 'beneficiaries'. It appears that a low level of project participation can negatively influence the perception of projects. For example, Lahai (2009) shows that in her study area in northern Ghana, the level of participation was moderate in projects regarded as best, but low in the worst projects. Nonetheless, in the current study, the DAs' projects were generally positively evaluated by the local inhabitants.

Women were generally less aware of the presence of DAs and their projects and were also less involved in their activities, at least partly as a result of development actors' discriminatory attitude towards women. Even so, on average, the women evaluated the projects more positively than men. PADev-type studies in northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso showed varied results in this regard, and included research communities in which women and men made similar evaluations (Dietz & the PADev team 2013; Rijnveld 2012; Lahai 2009). The difference in the current study should be considered with care, however, because men and women did not always evaluate the same projects.

These results reflect those from a case study on an NGO project in southern Burkina Faso in which limited participation did not lead to a negative perception of the project (Marsais 2009). Here, local inhabitants saw their role in the project

merely as a support to the organization and abdicated any decision-making power, for which no space was provided by the NGO either. “[...] It was acknowledged that participation was merely represented by adherence of beneficiaries to the ideas of the project” (Marsais 2009; 142). Marsais (2009) also argues that this shows a dependency towards development aid, and a lack of confidence towards their own autonomous capacities, which averts empowerment:

Indeed, the participatory paradigm, re-appropriated by the mainstream development discourse, has turned away from its original purposes of empowerment against various forms of oppression and domination. Rather than fostering full consciousness on the duty of populations to take part in processes of social change, it has worked as another tool of dependency towards what one can call the ‘Western model’ of development. (*Ibid.*: 141).

Only one of the 30 researched organizations referred to both participation and empowerment in its mission statement, arguably indicating that empowerment is not a related objective. Marsais (2009) labelled this type of participation as pseudo-participation, as genuine participation comprises features of empowerment and cooperation, while pseudo-participation is merely composed of assistance and consultation. This type of participation could be linked to participation as a means instead of an end of development.

The former refers to a rather passive experience where people are told what to do in order to attain pre-determined objectives. Hence the top-down approach is maintained and empowerment is not achieved. Participation as an end is a path by which local actors are empowered through different steps. People are directly involved in shaping, deciding, and taking part in the development process from the bottom-up perspective (Audet-Bélanger 2010: 30-31).

The generally positive evaluation of the projects corresponds with the results of similar, recent PADev-type research in northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso (Rijneveld 2012; Audet-Bélanger 2010; Bymolt 2010; Lahai 2009). However, Audet-Bélanger (2010) notes that the PADev criterion ‘local presence’ was (very) negatively judged for the three evaluated projects in her study. Also in the current study, it was this criterion that scored below the positive average. Actually, although local representation was considered an important component of the decentralization policy of many DAs, most agencies did not have a local office or representative. Instead, they visited the area on a regular basis and/or used a middleman, despite the fact that local inhabitants prefer direct collaboration. Remarkably, the PADev criterion ‘realistic expectation’ was judged above average, be it with a range from 2 to 5, while the main perceived weakness of collaboration was that DAs did not deliver what they had promised. People’s experience and/or interpretation of this aspect differed, but it also depended on the specific DA or project involved. Dietz & the PADev team (2013) also noted that aid perceived as ‘bad’ did not live up to its promises and expectations.

The four (national) government projects were rated very differently, something similar was also noted in a PADev-type study in northern Ghana. Here,

Bymolt (2010) suggested that the varied ratings could be interpreted as performing somewhat less, but this refers mainly to the ratings of different criteria. Actually, Dietz & the PADev team (2013) noted that government agencies in most areas in northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso were more often perceived to be involved in ‘bad’ aid than NGOs or the private sector. ‘Bad’ aid was perceived to be, among other things (see discussion below), quick (‘hit and run’) and looking for fast and visible success, which is often not sustainable (Dietz & the PADev team 2013). For instance, projects with a longer duration (e.g. 30 years) can draw lessons and incorporate them into local democratic governance structures, provided they have enough resources to do so (Wangui Chomba 2015). In line with these findings, this study revealed that increasing the duration of projects was a common local aspiration, including the provision of resources for the continuation of the project when the agency pulls out. Similarly, in Marsais’ (2009) study in Burkina Faso, most of the respondents believed it necessary to have another project to continue the activities of the preceding project.

#### Concluding remarks

Local collaboration is propagated by development actors, including through their mission statement (frequently referring to decentralization, empowerment, and/or local participation) and by their employees (in various ways, and often less explicitly). However, since participation and the delegation of authority (including decision-making) was limited in this study, empowerment appeared limited as well and the collaboration between DAs and the local populations showed characteristics of pseudo-participation. The local population did not move to a full partner position. These results correspond with the wildlife sector in Tanzania, where policies and laws were directed towards decentralized environmental governance. Here, Kwango *et al.* (2015) noted that the transfer of power and authority to local levels had been limited, and decision-making had not been brought close enough to the people, therefore limiting participation and accountability. In line with these observations, and based on his research in Mali, Kassibo (2006 & 2002) argues that laws and/or systems are needed that award authority to local institutions and individuals to support local empowerment and participation.

In the studied interactions, local representation and democracy appear to be promoted at the social interface, as DAs work directly with the community or through locally elected leaders, and not through influential non-elected people. Influential people, including former traditional chiefs (i.e. customary authorities), can be elected as CO board members or as government officials in the country’s deconcentrated administration and collaborate with DAs once in that position.

Nonetheless, in contrast to Hilhorst's (2008) findings, customary authority played no important traditional role, also not in the remote Higa area.

The perceptions of both the DAs and the local population, as well as observations of interactions at the interface, show that their collaboration does not take place in the form of struggles and conflict, but rather of reasonable collaboration. There is mostly agreement, but the participation level was somewhat restricted especially regarding the design of projects, policies, and programmes (and less so regarding the implementation). Decision-making is mostly done by the DAs, who seem to be in charge, and agreements do not, therefore, necessarily have to be made. Also, it is doubtful whether it is fair collaboration in cases where the DA is the principal decision maker.

In conclusion, this study revealed some important factors to consider when it comes to local collaboration, especially regarding decentralization, empowerment, and participation. For instance, DAs should consider firming their local presence to meet the needs of the local inhabitants, and be cautious with what they promise to the local population in order to manage realistic expectations. Furthermore, DAs should be aware that when exclusively working with COs, a particular selection of the community is included. They should consider involving other collaboration structures as to include, for example, (more) women and the poorest community members. Similarly, for engaging in partnerships, COs should be chosen carefully according to their representation of the community (i.e. composition of members). Furthermore, DAs should be supporting the founding of new COs when local inhabitants have genuine motives and intentions and not when inhabitants do it merely to comply with DAs' requirements. The same applies to participation in projects, because 'false' motives can threaten the sustainability of the project or CO. Another aspect to consider is whether the new CO would have much overlap in activities and objectives with other, already existing COs, because overlap could create conflicts as the CO could be regarded as competition for DAs' assistance and resources. For long-term sustainability, DAs should consider increasing the duration of the project and/or developing a follow-up project. Preferably, the project should provide local inhabitants with enough capacity, skills, and resources to continue activities on their own when the project and/or DA's assistance has ended. Lastly, although limited participation did not seem to lead to negative perception of DAs' projects, it limited empowerment. Moreover, increased local participation, and primarily local inhabitants' input in meetings, was a common aspiration among the researched inhabitants.