

Benin Field Report

Defining, targeting and reaching the very poor

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The research project 'Defining, targeting and reaching the very poor' has resulted in 5 Working Papers. These volumes are field reports on Bangladesh (Working Paper 126), Benin (Working Paper 127), Jeldu, Ethiopia (Working Paper 128), Addis Ababa (Working Paper 129) and finally a Synthesis (Working Paper 130). Please note that Working Paper 126 on Bangladesh is a co-production with the International Institute of Asian Studies IIAS in Leiden.

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Introduction

In 2007 three Dutch NGOs decided to support research into the development of a new methodology for monitoring and evaluation called PADev (Participatory Assessment of Development).¹ One of the NGOs participating in this research was Woord&Daad. When the first major findings of this research were presented a couple of years later, Woord&Daad was particularly struck by one of them; namely, that the poorest of the poor were not being reached by the bulk of the development initiatives.

A follow-up study was conducted in 2010² which confirmed these conclusions, namely that the poorest were unable to evaluate development interventions carried out in their region, since these interventions did not manage to reach them directly. The main reason given for this failure was the fact that the very poor are 'invisible' and extremely difficult to target.

The obvious question that follows from these findings is how, then, to target the very poor? And can they be targeted at all? To answer this question, it is essential to first define and find the very poor and look at the struggles they face. Moreover, it is important to shed light on the inclusiveness or exclusiveness of development interventions regarding the very poor and the reasons behind it.

Thus, when the proposal to carry out further research on this was presented, Woord&Daad decided to come on board and fund part of the research. In return they asked that the research be carried out in locations where their partners were based. This led to three case studies in three countries and four field locations, the first one being Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is the only Asian country included in this research and not without good reason.

Firstly, Bangladesh is still amongst the poorest countries of the world. With an HDI of 0.515, it ranks 146 out of 187. And even though Bangladesh ranks above average in terms of countries in the low human development group, it ranks lower on average when comparing the HDI to other South Asian countries (0.558).³ Looking at the HDI from 1980 to 2012, it must be noted that the HDI has increased from 0.312 in 1980 to 0.515 in 2012. This is interesting when looking at the enormous NGO presence in the country and, in particular, the many initiatives addressing the very poor; also in terms of how successful or not these initiatives are.

The absolute leader in this regard is the NGO BRAC. With 41 years of history in development work, this NGO has a lot of experience doing development work and experimenting with targeting the very poor. The latter is of great interest for this research. Over the years, BRAC has developed a method to target the very poor, called the 'Targeting the Ultra Poor (TUP)' programme.

It is worthwhile looking at whether these attempts have been successful and, more importantly, whether it is possible to reproduce this success in a different context, particularly in an African context. For obvious reasons the research cannot include all NGOs in Bangladesh, but it takes the 'potential influence' of BRAC into account in the

¹ www.padev.nl

² Kazimierczuk, A. (2010) http://www.padev.nl/infosheets/infosheet_agnieszka_followup.pdf

³ UNDP, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BGD.html>

research areas and especially in Woord&Daad's partners'⁴ approach to targeting the very poor.

The second location that was selected as a case study was Benin. Like Bangladesh, it is a comparatively poor country. Despite an increase in Benin's HDI due to education and health improvement, the HDI is 0.436 in 2011, which ranks 166th out of 187.⁵ The other argument for selecting Benin is Woord&Daad's partner. This organization is implementing different types of initiatives in, for example, the education sector, microcredit and agribusiness. This provides an opportunity to compare different programmes and examine whether certain programmes have greater potential to reach the poorest.

Lastly, Ethiopia was included due to the increased insecurity and income differences in the country. The top layer of elite-related business people, officials and civil servants are safe in their jobs and income while the large mass of peasants and workers are struggling to make ends meet and retain their dignity.⁶ The HDI for 2012 is 0.396, which positions Ethiopia 172nd out of 187 countries.⁷ Ethiopia is also an interesting case study because Woord&Daad's partner has some experience in targeting the very poor and, in addition, they are very active in an urban context. Given that the other two case studies are in a rural context, it was important to include an urban environment, because poverty is increasingly urbanised. However, a Woord&Daad partner working in a rural area of the country (in Jeldu District) was also added. Thus, two case studies were conducted in Ethiopia.

As mentioned earlier, the second partner of Woord&Daad in this research is an NGO in Benin. In the introduction it was mentioned that this NGO was selected in order to compare different types of initiatives to find out whether some are more likely to reach the very poor than others. To study this, it made most sense to conduct the field research in Nikki where the NGO has several initiatives.

Benin is divided into twelve departments, which are subdivided into 77 communes. These communes are again split up into cities (districts) or villages. Nikki is a commune situated in the Borgou department. It is also the name of the city and the district. The commune has approximately 137,721 inhabitants⁸ and it covers about 3170 square kilometres. Unlike other parts of Benin, the majority of Nikki's inhabitants are Muslims, followed by Christians and Animists. However, most of the people who adhere to either Islam or Christianity are also animists. However, key to understanding this area well, is not so much the religious diversity, but the ethnic diversity and, more importantly, the tensions between various ethnic groups.

There are many different ethnicities living in Nikki, such as the Dendi, Otamari, Yoruba, Fon, Adja, Yom and Lokpa, but these form the minorities. The Batonou or Bariba and the Fulani and Gando are the largest groups in this area. Officially, the Bariba are the biggest ethnic group in Nikki (45.4%) followed by the Fulani and Gando together (40.4%).⁹ However, these figures can change depending on who you speak to, because both claim to be the biggest group.

⁴ The names of the partner organizations will not be mentioned for reasons of confidentiality.

⁵ UNDP, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BEN.html>

⁶ Mehler, A., Melber, H. & van Walraven, K. (2011) *Africa Yearbook 2010: Politics, Economy and Society South of the Sahara*. Leiden: Brill. p. 327

⁷ UNDP, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/images/explanations/ETH.pdf>

⁸ This is an estimation of the municipality of Nikki. The last census was conducted in 2001.

⁹ Percentages as presented by the municipality of Nikki.

The tension lies in the fact that, in the past, the Gando were used as slaves by the Bariba. The latter forms part of the kingdom of Borgou, which is in the northeast of Benin and the northwest of Nigeria. The Gando are seen as the “discarded children” of the Bariba. The Bariba had a variety of beliefs, one of which included that if a child was born in the breech position, rather than head first, the child was bewitched. Or if the mother died giving birth, the child was either killed by smashing it against a Baobab tree or they abandoned the child. These children were often taken in by the Fulani who used them as slaves. The Gando have therefore adopted the culture and language of the Fulani and oppose the Bariba. The Bariba, in turn, feel superior to the Gando, because the latter are former slaves and the Bariba believe they originate from the kingdom.

There are even tensions about the question of which ethnicity is poorer. A Bariba will say it is the Bariba, because the Gando and Fulani have greater access to large pieces of land. Non-Bariba believe the Gando people are poorer, as they live on the outskirts of the commune in the bush. They do not have access to education, healthcare and clean drinking water.

The first step in the research was to get an idea of the wealth categories within Nikki commune as a whole and to find out if there were any specific approaches to targeting the very poor. To do this, a workshop was conducted with officials in Nikki city. With this information and after consultation with the NGO, three villages were selected that represent their work and have a variety of initiatives that can be compared.

The first village is Tapa, which lies about eight kilometres north of Nikki city. Tapa is a mixed village in terms of ethnicity, although the majority is Fulani and Gando. There are about 500 inhabitants. The second village is Ouenou, approximately eight kilometres east-southeast of Nikki city. Ouenou has 1430 inhabitants according to the 2001 census for Nikki municipality. It is a dominantly Bariba village with some Fulani and Gando living on the outskirts of the village in the bush. The third village that was selected is Tontarou, which is approximately ten kilometres south-southeast of Nikki city and has 2549 inhabitants. Here too, like Ouenou, the Bariba mostly live in the core village and the Fulani and Gando in the surrounding areas.

In collaboration with staff of the NGO in Nikki, people were invited from the three villages to participate in six workshops¹⁰ with, in total, 40 participants. For this case study there was no separate workshop with very poor people. There was a strong focus on life histories because it was thought that this would provide more in-depth information for this region than having a workshop. Instead, an extra exercise was added¹¹ to the workshops and there was room for discussion at the end on where to find the very poor and how to reach them.

After gathering this information, the search for the very poor began; however, it quickly ground to a halt. There were a couple of reasons for this. Firstly, the villages included in the case study are geographically located in favourable places in comparison to other areas in Nikki commune. They are all close to Nikki city and to the border with Nigeria, which opens room for small trade. Moreover, land is generally not hard to find and the majority can therefore sustain themselves by working on the land. Another important reason is the culture of shame among the Bariba. Many subjects are considered taboo as they are shameful, including poverty. This makes it hard to speak about being poor, let

¹⁰ The different workshops consisted of older men (above forty), younger men, older women, younger women, male NGO beneficiaries and female NGO beneficiaries.

¹¹ The PADev listing initiatives exercise.

alone being very poor. The final reason is the extreme presence of fetishism in these villages and the area as a whole. There is little trust between people.

After many visits and long strolls through the villages, building trust and finding people who wanted to help facilitate the search for the very poor, ten life histories¹² were conducted. In order to get a glimpse of the life of very poor people in the city, one life history was conducted with a beggar in Nikki city.

In addition, several interviews were conducted with NGOs, religious organizations and government bodies to find out what initiatives they have for the very poor and what their target practices are.



PAdDev workshop with young women¹³

¹² The life histories are available from the author on request.

¹³ All photos in this report were taken during fieldwork by Anika Altaf

Workshop officials

The first workshop was held with a group of people in Nikki city, referred to as the 'officials'. These are people who are in some way linked to very poor people through their work and represent different sectors of the society, i.e. teachers, NGO representatives, government representatives and religious leaders. Thirteen officials participated in the workshop, representing the government, the mosque, the Catholic and Protestant churches and NGOs. The leader of the motor taxi drivers in Nikki centre was also present, because the taxi drivers know their area well and have a good understanding of who is considered poor and who is not.

During the workshop with the officials the wealth ranking exercise was conducted. The officials wanted to add another category to the five existing categories; namely, immensely rich. Below is a description of this and the other wealth categories.

Table 1 Perceptions of wealth and poverty by officials in Nikki city

Immensely rich (<i>armani gi</i>)
The immensely rich are those who are very rich and do not need anything. They have a lot of gold and employees. They have children and are healthy. They own cars and cattle. The fact that they have a lot of gold makes them belong to the immensely rich.
Very Rich (<i>dukia gi</i>)
The very rich have money and children. They are the leaders and people appreciate them. They do not have much gold. They are similar to the immensely rich, but the amount of gold makes the difference.
Rich (<i>u noba yem</i>)
Those who have money and other material possessions. They are traders and own hotels/restaurants in town. They have many houses in Nikki. Their children study in Europe and they can visit them there if they like or just go there for holidays. In Nikki you cannot tell from a person's clothes if they belong to the rich category, but you can tell from their houses. They have good houses. They send their children to private schools. However, there are also rich people who live like poor people, because they prefer to invest their money in farming, big farm lands and cattle. But this is changing now. The majority of rich people are farmers or traders. They sell their cattle and their crops.
Average (<i>u sans saa</i>)
People belonging to the average wealth category are able to solve their own problems. They are able to support their family and can also support other people. They eat well and own a car. Their family is healthy.
Poor (<i>bwe bwe</i>)
Poor people are needy. They manage to eat, but they cannot solve their problems. They depend on others. Their houses are in poor condition and their children go to public schools. They work as farmers, but they do not have enough land to produce crops to sell or even to sustain themselves. They cannot afford fertilizers either.
Very poor (<i>yaro (nyaro)</i>)
People who can only eat once a day. Food is a major problem. Sometimes people fear giving the very poor food, because they are afraid they might be contaminated by them, as they are dirty and may carry bacteria.

Firstly, it is interesting that even five wealth categories were not sufficient according to the officials. Looking at the six wealth categories, there is a great gap between the immensely rich and the very poor. Also, the very poor are associated with words such as 'dirty' and people are 'afraid to be contaminated' if they touch them. They are viewed in a negative way.

Wealth group percentages

After defining the different categories, the next step was to look at the wealth distribution of these categories. However, the officials were not able to give an estimation of the percentages of the different wealth classes and they advised visiting the municipality to obtain accurate numbers. However, the municipality was also unable to provide the percentages. The secretary of the mayor gave the following estimation according to his own opinion.

Table 2 Perceptions of wealth distribution in Nikki city

Very rich	0%
Rich	5%
Average	40%
Poor	50%
Very poor	5%
Total	100%

According to the secretary, the average and poor constitute the largest sections of the population in Nikki city.

Weddings and funerals

Weddings and funerals differ quite a bit amongst the different categories of people and are significant in revealing an individual's wealth. The officials expressed the following differences in weddings and funerals:

Weddings

The traditions performed at the weddings are the same for anyone regardless of the wealth class. The Imam or priest will read the same prayers, whether it is a poor person's wedding or a rich person's. The difference can be found in the feast that is held. A rich person will organise a feast lasting many days. Moreover, the dowry that is given is symbolic, but important. The rich can give much more than the poor and, in doing so, they

show their wealth. A poor person may sometimes be able to delay the dowry. He can marry and pay off the dowry during the marriage.

Funerals

All Muslims bury their dead in the same way, whether they are rich or poor. They are all buried in a white cloth and in the same cemetery. The ceremony differs however. Since poor people do not wish to be indebted to others, so they do not spend much on the funeral ceremony of their dead and thus the ceremony is completed within a day. A poor leader, however, can have a funeral like a rich person. A funeral ceremony for a rich person can last an entire week or longer.

The Christians also read the same prayers for everyone, rich and poor, but here too the ceremony differs. The coffin of a rich person will be more expensive and the dead person will be dressed up nicely. A poor person may even be buried without a coffin.

The very poor and development initiatives

The officials mentioned a few initiatives that are, in their opinion, reaching the very poor. One of them is the RAS (*Réseau Alliance Santé*) health project. RAS has two types of programmes, one is health insurance and the other project is prenatal care. Especially the latter reaches out to the very poor. The concept of this project is that the entire village pays FCFA 350 per person. The money is collected and placed in an account. Whenever a pregnant woman needs prenatal care, she is assisted with money from this account. RAS only works with villages that are willing to cooperate. If there are members in the community who do not wish to pay, RAS will not consider this village as a partner for collaboration.

The soy projects by Dedras and Fludor help people with seeds. According to the officials, they target the very poor.

Wells constructed by Helvetas (Swiss) and PADEA also target the very poor. The whole village contributes to a well. Even if someone does not pay, they can still use the water. This way the very poor also benefit.

Microfinance does not reach very poor people, because the very poor do not have money to pay the obligatory guarantee at the start of the project.

Workshops rural Nikki

Workshops were conducted with villagers from three different villages: Tepa, Ouenou and Tontarou. The abbreviations mentioned below indicate the groups.

Groups:

Older men rural Nikki: (OM)

Older women rural Nikki: (OW)

Younger men rural Nikki: (YM)

Younger women rural Nikki (YW)

Male NGO beneficiaries: (DM)

Female NGO beneficiaries: (DW)

Perceptions about local history and important events

During the events exercise, the participants were asked to recollect important events that had occurred in the three villages in the past thirty years. Important events are those considered to be part of the collective memory and/or are considered to have a lasting impact on the area. Through this exercise, a summary of the local perceptive history can be drawn. Moreover, the exercise assists participants in the following exercises, which require a comparison of the present and the past.

Table 3 Perceptions of local history and important events in rural Nikki

Year	Description
1945-1965	A river called Yakparou in Tontarou was a magical place for many years. Birds made their nests in the water and they and their baby birds came out alive. It was a miracle. But the river was disrespected on a number of occasions. For example, women entered the water while they were having their periods; this was not allowed. After the river had been disrespected, the water dried up. There is no longer water in that river. (OM)
1975	Once, a man in Tontarou went out to farm and met an elephant. He came very close to the elephant: there was a distance of only three metres between the two. But before the elephant could harm the man, he found himself in his house again. It was magic. (OM)
1980	The animals of pastoralists were dying, no one knew why. At times, they would wake up to find twenty dead animals. The people who lost their cattle suffered a lot. Some of them are still suffering, because they lost everything back then. (YM)
1982	An elephant destroyed many yam fields. It was difficult that year to obtain seeds for the next season, because the seeds are usually taken from the yams, but they had been destroyed. (YM)
1983	A fire destroyed the fields and houses. There were too many bushes and it was dry. That year there were no shea nuts because everything had been burnt. (DM)
1984	A disease killed almost all domestic animals. Due to the disease some animals were not able to eat and they had wounds and subsequently died. (DM)

1985	The king of Nikki is not allowed to visit Tontarou. If he does, he will meet bad spirits. The king of Nikki visited Tontarou twice during this period. He died within two years of his second visit. People are convinced that it was because he visited Tontarou even though it was forbidden. (YM)
1986	In Tontarou, the yam completely dried up. There was enough rain, but there was more sun than usual. (YM)
1987	Many people were operated on for hernias. (DM)
1988	Fulani men climb in the trees during the dry season to search for food. Once, a Fulani man in Tapa climbed the tree, but the branch broke. The man did not fall out of the tree, the people saw him walking out of the forest from another side. This was also a magical event. (OM)
1988	A type of insect ate all the leaves on the trees. The shea nut trees grew less shea nuts from that moment on. (DM)
Around 1990	The king of Ouenou died, but someone was in need of the head of a dead person. They stole the head of the king and put it in a polythene bag. However, the head started to dance in the bag and in the village. Someone decided to point out the thieves. This person was killed by the perpetrators using magic.
1992	A severe drought occurred. Everything that had been planted dried: the yams and the maize. The trees died. People were very hungry and they had to go all the way to Nigeria to buy food. (OM) There was no water, even though it was the rainy season. Sometimes it would rain, but not enough to fill the rivers and wells. Calabashes were used to collect water. (OW)
1992	A white man visited Tontarou and asked what was needed. The people were in need of a well. Unfortunately, when the digging started, they came across big stones. The stones could not be removed, because the people believed that whoever removed the stone would die. The stones were not removed. The consequence of this was that there was only water in the well during the rainy season. Prior to this, four other attempts had been made to dig a well, but there was no water in the ground in those places. (OW)
1996 or 1997	Locusts destroyed all the fields and farms. There was hunger and people suffered a lot. They went to the government to ask for help, but the government did not really help the people in Nikki. The people in Bembereke and Ndali did get help. (OM, YM, DM)
1997	In Tapa a river flooded and afterwards people would hear the sound of drums. As soon as they came close to the river and looked into the water they saw and heard nothing. When they moved away, the drumming would start again. (YM)
1997	A lion came to Tapa and ate their cattle. People ran away and took their children with them. They were very afraid.
1998	The first minister of the king of Nikki had been buried in the cemetery of Ouenou. Two years after his death, grave desecrators took his head to sell it for a lot of money. Someone had informed the chief of Ouenou about this and ceremonies were held in order to find the perpetrators. The next day they found the people who asked for the head (someone who heard that they were praying to find the perpetrators, told the chief what he heard around the cemetery. They found them, even the one who flew to Nigeria). They were sent to prison, where they died. The grave desecrators also died. (YM)

1998	A number of people died or lost their hearing from meningitis. (DM)
1999	In Tontarou there was a quarrel between two men. One of them came from Cobli (Atakera department) and the other one was from the area. The man from Cobli visited the other man and told him that two of his children were in fact his, as he had been making love to the man's wife. He took the children with him. The men quarrelled afterwards. The man from Tontarou wounded his own leg to show his anger. Something similar to this story also occurred in Ouenou. (YM)
2000	There was a lot of rainfall in Tontarou, so much that the dam overflowed. People were afraid of the water. They found a fish that was as big as a cow. (OW)
2002 or 2004	There was a place in the bush in Tontarou where no plants were growing. It was clean as if it was inside a house. For two weeks people heard the sound of music and drums coming from the ground. There was no hole in the ground. It was probably Jins (ghosts). People were really afraid. (OW, YM)
2002	People suffered from a severe famine. When people left their cooking pots with food unattended for just a few minutes, it was stolen by the time they returned. Many people died of hunger. (OW, YM) Those who could afford food ate rice, others ate a soup made from vegetables.
2002	There was a lady in Ouenou who was 'spirited' and she was behaving like a mad person. She was tired of life and she hung herself on a tree. When a person hangs himself, you are supposed to cut the rope/cloth that was used and bury them under that same tree. The people did not do this for the lady. They brought her to her house to perform the ceremonies before they buried her. They believe that by doing so the spirits were not removed and, consequently, a lady from the same compound killed herself with a knife within three months. The people believe it was the spirit of the lady looking for vengeance. (OW)
2004	A major drought occurred during the rainy season for 45 days. There was no rain for the entire months of June and July (normally the rainy season is from May to October). The crops dried up and this caused a famine.
2005	A famine occurred. Maybe the reason was because there was more cotton farmed than food during this period. There was no food to be bought. The little food that was stored, was sold for ridiculous prices. One sack of grain was traded for a motorbike. People mixed the food they had, for example cassava with soybeans, but this combination made people ill. Many people migrated. People were desperate. One man, who migrated to Nigeria, left his family and never returned, because he could not sustain his family. Another man poisoned his family. He could not feed them and thought it would be better for them to die. Many children died of malnutrition. (YM, DM)
2005	On a Wednesday, between 7 and 10 AM, the skies darkened and it was as if it was night time. It had been announced on the radio that a solar eclipse would occur and people were warned not to look directly into the sky. They could not see anything, it was so dark, but they bought sunglasses to look at the sky. (YM, YW) A teacher at school told the children to stare at the floor and they had pain in their necks afterwards. Some people in the village looked at the sun via the reflection in the water. (DM)
2005	Someone in Tontarou wanted to kill himself and went into the bushes to do so. Villagers, who found him, took him back to his house. But in the end, he killed himself with a gun. (YW)

2005	A girl in Tapa was told to marry a man whom she did not love. She ran away and jumped into a well, she died. (YW)
2005	In Ouenou, a girl took a necklace, but she denied taking it. She was struck by lightning and died. (YW)
2005	In Tontarou a lady left her toddler alone outside. A strong wind (storm) came and after that wind the child never walked again. It was something magical. (YW)
2006	Around 8PM, the sky filled with stars. Never in their lives had they witnessed so many stars. (YW)
2006	A child died and while digging his grave in the compound, one of the walls fell and killed the mother of this child. (YW)
2007	A drought occurred in Ouenou. The water in the wells and even in the boreholes dried up. (DW)
2007	A lady with special powers came to Tontarou. She was able to reveal anything that someone had done in the past. She could even tell if someone had killed someone. The people who did bad things acknowledged their crimes when she exposed them. Some of them were sent to prison for five years. It was hard for the people, because they had to take care of the families of those who went to prison. (DW)
2008	There was a conflict between some people in Tontarou. There were a number of individuals involved in sorcery. They killed other villagers using their magic. They would use plants or the organs of dead people, which they dug up from the graves to perform spells. One of the sorcerers had a child who was about fifteen years old and he was unable to speak. His father decided to kill his son. There is a saying that when you kill a strong person, you will reveal what you have done in the past. After he killed the child, he started to reveal what he had done. The villagers came to beat him and one of the other sorcerers killed himself before the villagers could beat him. The police arrested the men who beat the sorcerer and accused them of murdering the other one. The chief and some youngsters were sent to prison for 3 years and 3 months. (OW)
2009	In Ouenou, there was insufficient production due to a lack of rain. People had to get food from other villagers, who managed to have a better production. (DW)
2011	Cholera caused many deaths amongst children. Many children were ill, they suffered from diarrhoea and vomiting. (DM)
2012	Heavy rainfall caused floods. At times, the rain would start at 7PM and end at 1PM the next day. Even in October there was still rain. The water entered the field and the houses. There was hunger and poverty. All the crops were destroyed by the water. In Tapa, standing water caused the death of cattle. People expect a famine in the coming year, because so many crops have been destroyed. (YM, YW, DW) Houses collapsed and many people died (sometimes because a house collapsed on them while they were sleeping). (DM)

What is striking in this table is the number of events that are fetishist related. Participants were able to mention this type of events in all three villages. Through this

exercise it became clear that fetishism played a great role in the past and that it remains of great importance to the villagers.

Trends in capabilities: Perceptions of change

The second exercise conducted was the 'changes' exercise. The purpose of this exercise is to assess the perceptions of change within six capitals, i.e. natural, physical, economic, human, socio-political and cultural. Within these six capitals, 41 items are subdivided. But before these items were probed, the participants were invited to mention any type of change they could recall. Changes that happened over a timeframe of 25-30 years ago until present time were captured. The results of this exercise are listed in table 4.

Table 4 Perceptions of change in rural Nikki

	Negative	Positive
Natural		
Animals (livestock, wildlife)		In the past when women went to collect water, they would encounter monkeys who would rape them. Now there are no more wild animals, it does not occur anymore. (DM)
Crops		Cashew nuts and soybeans were introduced into the area. The cashew nuts were introduced in the whole of Benin in the early years of independence by president Maga. Both crops are easy to grow, unlike cotton. The advantage of cashew nuts is that other crops can be planted on the same farm land. Several NGOs helped the community to obtain the seeds and provided knowledge on how to grow them. (OM, YM) People had a good harvest from the soybeans and selling the soy is profitable. People can even buy cars now. Previously, when people could only produce and sell cotton, they would never get their money in time from the government and there was no fixed price for cotton; you could be cheated anytime. There is a fixed price for soybeans. For 100kg of soybeans, you receive 1600

		CFA. (YM, DM)
Crops	For 15 years, even in the rainy season the shea nut trees have been dry. There are less trees than in the past and the reason for this is unknown. (DM)	
Forest	Deforestation is ongoing. In order to farm people are cutting trees. And the number of people who are starting to farm is growing. They burn trees to clear land. And carpenters need the wood too. Trees are also used for firewood. (OM) Moreover, there are more people trading wood now, even people from the south are cutting the trees for wood. Meanwhile wood is getting scarcer and no new trees are planted. People fear there will be desertification in the area. (YM, DM)	When people produced yams, they used to cut many trees; now they produce cashew nuts and they are cutting fewer trees and replant them. People are now aware of the importance of replanting. (DM)
Weather	For 13 years, when it rains, there has been a strong wind that can even blow away the roof of a house. (OM)	
Water	The rainy season is changing, there is less rain. This has changed the seeding process. In the past, when it used to rain, after the rain stopped the seeding would start, because there would be rain again later on. Now, when the first rain comes, the seeding is started, because if it is delayed, the seeds will dry out. (OM)	
Physical		
Buildings (types/quality)		Previously, people only had access to straw to construct their roofs. Whenever there was a fire, the entire village could be burnt down. Since many people now have tin roofs, there is less fear of fire. Even if people still have straw roofs, at least the whole village will not burn down. (OM, DM)

Buildings (types/quality)		In the past there were bad quality buildings that functioned as schools. There was only one room for two classes. The roof was made of straw. Now the building is made of concrete and is well constructed. The building is strong now and it does not need to be reconstructed every year. (YM) Moreover, the children sat outside in the sun. (YW)
Buildings (types/quality)		The roof of the chief of Tontarou is made of tin. Before, he used straw for the roof. The children of the village had to collect the straw and it took the villagers another day to place it on his roof. Since he has a tin roof, a lot of time is saved. (YM)
Dams/boreholes		There is potable water available. People used to fetch water from the river, but it was polluted. People would be ill from drinking it. In particular, the men who drank the water in the dry season would have problems urinating. Also the river would sometimes dry out. Since there have been wells, these problems are solved. (DM)
Dams/boreholes		In the past there was only one well in Tontarou and it took the ladies a lot of time to fetch water. Now there is water everywhere because of the drillings. Even in the schools there is potable water. (YM, YW)
Dams/boreholes	The climate has changed in the past 20 years. The wells have dried up and the boreholes are only accessible once a day in Tapa. In the other villages, people have to pay 10 Francs for a big bucket of water of about 20 to 25 litres. (DW)	
(Farming) tools		Since the mill has been introduced, the women no

		longer have to grind with their own hands. Now it is easier and faster to grind. A lot of time is saved. (OW)
(Farming) tools		There are now machines in Tapa processing cotton, in order to prepare it ready for selling. Before, they were forced to sell every part of the cotton, including the seeds. The machines separate the seeds and they can be reused. In the past, they would have to buy the seeds every time. (OW) It also provides the youth with work. The women come to sell them yams and maize when they are working. The owner of the machine owns the borehole and his employees can fetch water from it. The surrounding area has electricity, which is also an advantage. (DW)
(Farming) tools		Women in Ouenou now have access to a machine to produce shea butter. In the past, women used their hands to produce it. This process took three full days. With the machine the process is completed within a few hours. (OW, YW)
(Farming) tools	Since 1993 people are using fertilizer, but now when they want to produce something without fertilizer, it does not grow. (DM)	Since the introduction of machines and fertilizers, producing many different crops has become easier. It saves people time and money. In the past, they had to ask many people to come and work on the fields during the harvest season, but that is no longer necessary. (DM)
(Farming) tools		The roads in Ouenou have improved a lot. (DM) The previous roads were bad and unsafe. Thieves used to hide in the bushes along the roads. (YW)
Telecommunication		In Ouenou, the MTN network is working. This has made calling much easier. In the past, people would have to go

		to the hospital to make a call. Now everyone can call. (YW)
Telecommunication		Mobile phones have facilitated easy communication. People can call someone in Parakou to ask something, instead of going there. (DM)
Telecommunication		Thanks to radio and television people can listen to the news from all around the world. It helps to change their ways of living for the good. (DM)
Human		
Health & Hygiene	Anaemia amongst babies is much more common now than before. In the past, babies were only fed natural things. They would be breastfed by their mothers and received natural herbs, which prevented the babies and children from falling ill. The mothers would also consume natural products during their pregnancies. Nowadays, babies are born in the hospital and they are breastfed, but they get medicine and only water. The mothers consume imported food from Europe for example and it is not natural. (OM)	
Health & Hygiene	People used to have stomach aches, headaches and back pain. Those were all the diseases that occurred. People never took medicine and they grew very old, up to 120 years. They ate only natural things prepared by their own hands and even consumed in natural utensils, like calabash and wooden spoons. Nowadays, people have many diseases, they do not grow very old, mostly sixty years. The food is no longer prepared naturally. Even the grinding mills that are made of iron cannot be trusted. It is unknown what exactly	

	happens during the production process, since the people are no longer preparing it themselves. Moreover, all the utensils are imported from Europe and elsewhere and are not made from natural products. (OM)	
Health & Hygiene		Pregnant women have access to the hospital nowadays. After giving birth, they have clothes for themselves and the baby. Previously, they had only one cloth and the baby was covered with leaves. (OW)
Health & Hygiene	Female circumcision is forbidden in Benin, but it was a good thing, because you could give birth more easily and pushing was easier. (OW)	Young women are no longer circumcised. This is a change for the better because women used to be circumcised with the same instrument. This was not hygienic at all. Moreover, some women would bleed so severely that they died. Others, giving birth for the first time, would bleed a lot, because their wounds would re-open. Also, sex is less enjoyable when you have been circumcised. (YM, DM)
Health & Hygiene	Young girls of about 14 years old are getting pregnant. Since there is no college in the village, girls stay in Nikki city. Their parents rent a room for them. There is no one to watch over them. This means that they can meet up with boys whenever they like. Early pregnancy is dangerous for young girls; they may even die giving birth. (YM)	
Health & Hygiene		Since prenatal care is present, mothers and babies are much healthier and taken care of. The centres where they receive prenatal care can also provide the mother with a birth certificate. (YM) The women only have to travel to Nikki town for severe cases. (DW)
Health & Hygiene		There are health centres now in the villages. In the past,

		people had to travel to town and some would even die on their way to the hospital (DM). Women had to travel to Nikki town to give birth. However, they are often still forced to go to Nikki, because there is not always a doctor present in the hospital. (YW)
Health & Hygiene	For the past five years there has been more malaria in the area. The reason for this change is not known, but it must be God who sent it. (DW)	Mosquito nets are freely distributed now (by the government or NGOs), whereas before people would have to buy them. The nets were expensive and many people could not afford them. The distribution of nets has led to a reduction in malaria. (DM)
Knowledge & Education (levels, enrolment)		Adult literacy programmes were introduced. It empowered people and others were no longer able to take advantage of them, since they could, for example, read the prices of things. They can also calculate and read (phone) numbers. (OM, YM, YW, DM, DW)
Knowledge & Education (levels, enrolment)	Young girls who go to school get pregnant early, because they go out from the house and meet people. (OW)	
Knowledge & Education (levels, enrolment)		<p>The numbers of children enrolling in education has increased. This is due parents' awareness of the importance of education. In Tepa, most of the people are Fulani and they preferred their children to take care of the cattle. Nowadays, they send their children to school. Even if the children do not have a lot of education, they can at least read a letter, for example. Also, there is less cattle now to take care of. (YM) Moreover, primary education is free. (DM)</p> <p>And parents even see to it that the children finish their homework. (DW)</p>

Economic		
Access to credit, banks		Women have access to credit, which allows them to buy things and sell them to earn money. (YW) They can send their children to school with the money they earn and buy school supplies for them. They get a loan of 30000 CFA. They return 5150 CFA each month for six months. If the amount is paid back, another loan of 30000 CFA can be obtained. If that is returned, they can lend 50000 CFA and that is the maximum amount. (DW)
inflation	Life has become harder and more expensive since the devaluation in 1994. Before that time, 10000 CFA would be sufficient for a long time and it could be spent on many things. The same amount can now be spent within an hour and it will not buy you a lot. E.g., before a sack of salt of 25 kg was 1500 CFA, now it is 4400 CFA. Tin for the roof was 9000 CFA per packet and now it costs 48000 to 75000 CFA. 20 packets of 50 kg cement used to cost 18000 CFA, presently it is 94000 CFA. (OM)	
Markets and shops		Cotton used to be sold for 140000 CFA per ton, some even sold it at 150000 CFA, but this year it increased to 260000 CFA for a ton. (DM)
Out-migration & Remittances	Children leave the village and migrate to the city or to Nigeria because they believe they will have a better life there. They think they will be able to buy a motorbike and other things. However, lot of the youngsters who leave do not find work and become bandits and drug addicts. (OM) Some will never return, they become mentally ill or are even killed. (YW)	

Paid jobs		Women no longer have to gather firewood, since the NGOs have helped them to find other ways of earning money (e.g. shea butter, cotton, gari ¹⁴ production). It saves them a lot of effort and time, because they used to walk to the market to sell the firewood. (OW)
Paid jobs		The villagers know how to produce soap and how to keep bees. Before, only the white people knew how to do these things. Carpentry and sewing clothes are also done locally now. It is a good opportunity, because the people can set the prices themselves and therefore things are less expensive than before. (DM)
Transport (means, costs)		Since there are motorbikes and cars, going from one village to another has become easy (OW, DM). It is even possible to go to Cotonou and return the same day. (OM)
Socio-political		
Elections		Since 2011 free voting cards have been distributed. These cards can also be used as an ID card. The card is used to obtain loans or pass over the Nigerian border. Normally an ID card costs around 10000 CFA to 11/12000 CFA. (DM)
Leadership structures (political, traditional, etc.)	In the past, there was a political party PRPB (Parti Revolutionnaire Populaire du Benin) even though it was a dictatorship, people had a lot of respect. Now there is democracy, but people living in the same house are divided by politics. One household member may belong to a different political party than the other member. (OM)	
Leadership structures	Political leaders lie to gain	

¹⁴ Food made from cassava.

(political, traditional etc)	power; if someone does not lie, they cannot be in power. Previously politicians also told lies, but not as many as nowadays. They used to be more rigorous. (OM)	
Safety	There are many more thieves nowadays and they even enter houses to rob people. It is because more children are leaving school and they are lazy but ambitious, so they start stealing. (DM)	
Cultural		
Appropriate behaviour	In the past, there were many families and there was only one chief, but now people want to lead their own families and people are becoming more individualistic. This is not a good thing. The community will, for example, still come to the aid of a sick person who is individualistic, so he or she will understand that a community is important. (OM) But people only think of community when they have problems. Young people prefer to live alone. That way all that he/she farms, is his/hers. In the past, there would be ten young men living in one compound, but these days everyone wants to live separately. But if a person becomes ill now, who will work for him/her? If (s)he had lived with nine other people, someone could help him/her. (YM)	
Appropriate behaviour	Parents curse their children, because they do not respect them anymore. They sometimes even leave the house without greeting them. (OM). The children do not listen to their parents anymore. If you tell your child not to do something, they will do it anyway. They constantly challenge their parents and marry the man or woman of	

	their choice. (OW)	
Appropriate behaviour	Unmarried young girls are getting pregnant more frequently. This is because they watch too much television. Many bad things are shown on television, such as pornography. Also, mobile phones have made communication easier. Young boys and girls can call each other at any time to meet. Moreover, they can watch movies and video clips on their phones as well. (OM)	
Appropriate behaviour		In the past it was not appropriate for women to talk in public. It is a good thing that this has changed, because they can speak now and participate in a workshop like this. (OW)
Appropriate behaviour		There is equality between boys and girls now. Boys also have to work after they get back from school, just like girls. (OW)
	Young children would not speak of sex in the past, but nowadays children listen to their parents when they speak of sex and they know everything at an early age. They get pregnant much earlier because of that. Moreover, it was normal that a woman would have sex only after her marriage, but now it is even done before marriage. (OW)	
Clothes		In the past men only had a cloth or skin of an animal to cover their sex, but when they went to farm, their penis moved from 'left to right' and was visible. (OW) If they wanted to go somewhere, they borrowed clothes from someone rich. They also did not have proper shoes. They used the bark of a tree as shoes. Now the men have clothes to cover themselves

		properly. The white people brought clothes (DM)
Fetishes	There is a type of magic now that makes women only want to engage in witchcraft. They do not care for their husbands anymore. (YW)	There is a magical place in Ouenou now that heals people who are ill. (YW)
Food	In the past people used to eat from the same bowl, but now everyone has their separate bowls. But if you are eating alone, you have more chance of getting poisoned. If people eat together, they will not put poison in their own food. (DM)	
Religion (Christianity, Islam, traditional, etc.)		A grand mosque has been built in Tapa, allowing many people to come together and pray. (YW)
Religion (Christianity, Islam, traditional, etc.)		In Ouenou a big Catholic church has been built. It is a very beautiful church and people no longer have to hold their masses outside. (YW)
Religion (Christianity, Islam, traditional, etc.)	Tapa recently got a café, where people can drink alcohol. It may be good for people who want to gather with their friends there. But the Muslims do not drink and therefore it is not a good place. (YW)	
Wedding		Previously, marriage ceremonies would last nine days and the dowry that was given was a Calabash, one cloth and five Francs. These days it is only one day, but the dowry is a lot more and that is a good thing. Moreover, it is a good change that marriage ceremonies no long take up so much time. (OW)

Firstly, there are more positive changes mentioned than negative ones. What is even more positive is that most of these positive changes are directly linked to development initiatives. For example: roads, introduction of cotton and soybeans, potable water, shea butter production and better access to primary education.

The changes that are mentioned as negative are mostly linked to climate change, inflation, migration and the increasing individualisation of the society.

Perceptions of wealth and poverty

The wealth ranking exercise of the PADev methodology was also used during these workshops. The workshop participants were asked to define five wealth categories, respectively: very rich, rich, average, poor and very poor. The exercise is an open question, participants give a description according to their perceptions.

Table 5 Perceptions of wealth and poverty in rural Nikki

Very rich (*Bariba: armani gi, gobi gi kpokpo, gobi gi, Fulani: modama*)

Who:

The very rich have good faith and money (OM, OW). They are powerful and obeyed by the whole community. E.g., when they ask people to vote for someone, the people will listen (DM). They are loved by many people (YM) and respected in the community (OM). You can tell they are very rich from the way they walk (OW). The very rich are well known, even outside the country, they have many contacts (YM).

They are office workers (OM,OW,YW). They are traders (OM,YW,DM,DW) and they have apprentices to assist them (DW). They can be farmers (OW,YW, DM, DW), but they will not sell their products immediately after harvesting, they will wait till the prices have gone up (DM). They own factories (YM) and stores (DW). They are politicians or just rich by heritage (OM). They can also become very rich by stealing (YW).

Some of them behave as poor people, because they fear that people will use (black) magic against them (DM).

Others are very rich, because they have many children who can work for them (DW).

Characteristics:

Education:

Their children go to private schools (OW,DM,DW), with cars and motorbikes (YM,YW,DW). They have more money to buy food than the other pupils (DM).The children of the very rich can also go to school in Europe (OM).

Farm/land/harvest:

They own big fields where they farm (YM).

Food:

They eat whatever pleases them and at convenient times (OM, DM). They eat well (YW).

Housing:

They have many nice houses (OM, OW). Their houses are clean and constructed of cement (YW,DM, DW). The whole compound can be of cement (YW). There is drinkable water in their houses (YW, DW) and they have nice furniture (DW).

Livestock:

They have a lot of cattle (YM, DW) and many oxen (DM). The Fulani can own a lot of cattle (100) (DM).

Social (support):

They can solve all their problems (YW). When people are in need, they can help with money (OW,

OM) or cattle (OM). When, for example, somebody is sent to the hospital, they can pay their fees (YW). They can pay the guarantee in case the community is in need (OM). They can send the poor to Mecca for the pilgrimage (YM). They are able to build a mosque or dig a well for the village (DM). They will even help the poor and the community for free (YM). There are, however, some very rich people who do not provide any kind of assistance (YW).

People also fear the very rich because they know many people. If someone is in a conflict with them, they could easily send this person to prison through their contacts (YM).

Their children are well dressed (OM, OW, DM) and healthy (YW, DM). Some of them may behave badly though, because their parents are wealthy (OM). They are recognized by their pampered behaviour. Not all of them are spoiled, some parents want to teach their children how to become rich themselves and they will be tough on them (OW). The children of the very rich get privileged treatment and are favoured; for example, they may jump queues (OW). They move around on their own motorbikes (OW, DM).

The very rich have many wives. They are clean and they do not suffer (YW). Their wives wear distinguished clothes (DM).

Other:

The very rich are always handsome and clean. They are well dressed (OM) and wear clothes of quality (YM). They have many clothes (YW).

They own many cars (OM, OW, YM, YW, DM, DW), motorbikes (OW, YW, DM) and buildings (YM, DW). They have a television (DW).

They are the first to buy new goods, e.g. new type of car (YW) and they are up to date with the latest fashion (DM).

Rich (*Bariba: gobi gi, dukia gi, ataziri, siwibamon, Fulani: modama*)

Who:

The difference between a very rich and a rich person is that the rich cannot make many people happy. They have money and are not in need of anything. They hide their money, unlike the very rich. You have to be close to them to know they are rich (OM).

The rich are also respected and they respect people (YM), but they are not as respected as the very rich (DM). They are well known in the community (YM), but less than the very rich (OM). They are like the very rich, but the difference lies in the quantity of their belongings (DM). The rich also have less good faith than the very rich (OM). But the rich can move in the community amongst the poor (DM).

The rich can be traders (OW, YM, DM), woodcutters (OW), shop owners, craftsmen, drivers, mechanics and farmers (YM, DM, DW). They can rear cattle (YM).

Characteristics:

Education:

The children go to private schools (OW, YM, DM, DW). They are either taken to school by taxi drivers when the parents are not free (OW) or they will go with their own motorbike (YM, DM, DW). The rich can pay their children's fees and school supplies (YM).

Food:

The rich eat well and they can choose what they wish to eat, but they cannot eat like the very rich (YW).

Housing:

They have nice houses built of concrete (YM, YW), cement and bricks (DM, DW). Their houses are less expensive than those of the very rich (OW).

Livestock:

The Fulani own cattle (50) (DM).

Social (support):

The rich can solve their own problems (YM, YW, DM). They have sympathy and help others with money, but not like the very rich (YM). When there is a meeting, the very rich are listened to the most, followed by the rich (DM).

Their wives are clean (YM, YW) and beautiful and they have sympathy for people (YW). Their dresses are of better quality than the dresses of the poor (DM).

Their children are well fed (YM, YW) and well dressed (YW). And they behave less arrogantly than the children of the very rich (OW).

Other:

The rich are healthy (YW). They dress well, but the quality of their clothes is less than the very rich (OW, YW). They own cars (OW, DM, DW) and they have a television (YM, DW).

They also own buildings and trucks, but not as big as the very rich (YM, YW).

Average (Bariba: u sano saa, u nomayem, tonouzakkaso, u byembu gi Fulani: mocheda)

Who:

The average people are in the middle (DM). They have money (OM) and they can fulfil their needs, but not more than that (OW). They are farmers (OW, YM, YW, DM, DW) and they can pay people to farm for them. They can also trade (OW). They pray to God to give them food, good health and clothes (YW). They are neither pitied, nor unhappy (DM). They are honourable (OM) and respected in the community, but not as much as the rich (DM).

Characteristics:

Education:

Their children go to public schools (OW, YM, YW, DM) and they go to school on foot (DW).

Farm/land/harvest:

They produce and sell the products (DW).

Food:

They eat when they are hungry (OM, DM), but they cannot eat like the rich (OW, YW). They can afford meat (5 times a week) (YM). The children can eat the TZ¹⁵ of the previous day before they leave for school (YW).

Housing:

Their houses are well made (OM) and the roof is made of tin (OW, DW). The house is constructed in a local way (YW), with local materials mixed with a little bit of cement (DM). They cannot paint their houses (OW, DW). Sometimes their house might be concrete, but it takes many years for them to construct it. It is not common for the average people to build with bricks (YM).

Livestock:

Some of them have some cattle (DW).

Social (support):

They are able to solve their own problems (OM, OW, YM) with or without help (OW). They are consulted on any important matter within the family or the community (e.g. when there is a ceremony in the family and they are not around, the family must wait for them). They are able to

¹⁵ Tuo Zaafi (TZ) is food made of cassava or corn.

give more than what is asked from the community members when a contribution is needed (YM). Their wives are sometimes clean, sometimes dirty. They cannot equal the wives of the rich. Their wives may sell firewood or food. They can earn some money and they do not suffer (YW). Their children are not in need, they are healthy (OM).

Other:

They can dress well, but not like the rich (OW, DW). When they are travelling, they dress like rich people (DW). Their children also dress well, but the quality of their clothes is less than those of rich children (OM, DW). They receive new clothes on special occasions, such as Ramadan (OW).

They may have a car but mostly they own a motorbike (OM, DM), a new one (YM). They can have the same phone as a rich person (DM).

Poor (*Bariba: bwe bwe, Fulani: talaka*)

Who:

The poor live according to their means. They do not wish to have problems. They are poor and their children always behave properly and they do not lie (OM). They never have enough (YM) and are always suffering (DM). They work as farmers (YM, DM), make pots and sell natural herbs (Tisane) (YW). They can also work for others to earn money (DM).

Characteristics:

Education:

Their children go to public schools (OM,OW,DW,YM) in old uniforms and without school supplies (YW). It is not easy for them to pay the school fees (YM). Their relatives assist them in paying the school fees. They are also assisted by white people and NGOs in paying the school fees and buying school supplies (OW). Their children go to school without money for food. (DM). Some poor people cannot send their children to school at all (DM).

Farm/land/harvest:

They farm but the food is not sufficient for the whole year and they need assistance (OW, YW).

Food:

They can eat (OM,YM,OW), but they have no surplus of food (OM). They can feed their children but not like the children of the rich (OW). The children eat TZ from the previous day (DM).

Housing:

The house is covered with straw (OW,YM,YW,DW) and is dirty (OW,YW). The roof can be made of old tin (YM). They cannot use cement for their houses (DM). However, they can have good houses, but it takes them five years to construct them. (OM).

Social (support):

The poor cannot solve their own problems, they do not have enough money (YW). They can sell their food to solve their problems (DM). They cannot help others. They do not have enough to give. They may be able to give yams, but they cannot give money (YM). They have to go to the rich to borrow money and they will give it to them (YW), because the rich pity them (OM).

They can have a wife and children (OW, DW), but the children and wife are dirty and pitiful (YW). Their wives may prostitute themselves to the rich to feed their family. They may lie that they got money from a sister. This is how they become powerful in the household (YM).

The poor cannot attend meetings because they are not listened to and they are not considered (YM).

Other:

They are dirty (YM). They have some clothes but not enough to change (OW,YM,DM). They can buy new clothes once a year (YM). The clothes they wear are repaired, because they are torn

(OW). They usually have one pair of shoes, that are old and repaired (OW). The wives are not well dressed. They can use the same clothes for more than one week. It is not easy to get soap to wash and therefore they are dirty. The clothes of the children are torn (DM). They are not well dressed and their trousers can be a different colour to their shirt. Their shoes are not nice either (OW).

They may have a motorbike (OM), but an old one (DM).

Very poor (*Bariba: saaroo, nyaro, Fulani: talkadjo*)

Who:

The very poor are immediately recognizable (OW). They are those who are always suffering. They are always praying for their lives to change (DM). And they are praying for someone to help them. They have nothing (YM, DW). They are beggars and bless those who give something to them. People pity them and people laugh at them (YM, YW). They are not considered in the society (OM). It is not their fault, it is their destiny (OW). But some do not have the will to work, which is why they are needy. They do not want to make an effort, but they are born like that, it is destiny. Everything they have is given by others (OM). They have no job, but they can help people with the transportation of their goods (YW). Others will do chores for people to earn money (OW). The absence of a very poor person will go unnoticed (YM).

Characteristics:

Education:

The very poor cannot send their children to school (DM). Only if they are assisted by relatives or through projects will their children be able to go to school. They go to public schools (OW).

Farm/land/harvest:

They do not often go to their farm lands (OM). They can farm, but if they do not want to farm, they are lazy (YM). They have access to farm land, but the production is not sufficient (OW), it is their destiny (DW).

Food:

Food is a major problem. The very poor are always thinking how they will manage to get food (DM). They need help from others to get food for themselves and their families (OW). They have to beg for food (YW, OM) and go from place to place to get it (YM). If the community will not provide them with food, they cannot eat (OM). If they receive food, they will usually get the leftovers or spoilt (rotten) food (DM). The children will get whatever is left by their parents (OW). They are recognized by their red hair and big bellies, which is a sign of malnutrition (OM). Some will work for a rich person in order to get food (DM, YM). Others will have to steal food (YM).

Housing:

Their houses and roofs are covered with straw (OW, OM). But even the straw is sometimes insufficient. Sometimes they may have a roof of old tin, which was given to them (DM). They cannot build their house on their own, they need help. If the roof has to be repaired, they need help. If no one will help, they cannot repair or replace it (DW). They do not clean their houses and everything is dirty. They can sleep on an old torn mattress (DM). Others stay with their family (YM) or may be given a small house to stay in (YM). But the very poor usually do not stay in one place for very long (YM); they may live with someone for one month and go to someone else the next month (OM). The very poor live within the community (OW, YW). Some live around the village (YW).

Livestock:

They do not have animals; if someone has animals they do not belong to the very poor (DW).

Social (support):

Some of them have a wife and children and some do not (DM,YW,OW). It is difficult for their

wives to eat and dress themselves. When they are sick, it not easy to have access to a hospital (YW). Even when they give birth, they need assistance to get medical care and clothes for their baby (OW). But even if the very poor men have a wife, they may get divorced, because they cannot take care of their wives (YM). Sometimes, they cannot control their wives, since they are the ones who bring the food for the family. The very poor women have more success in marriage. Once they are married, they are safe and taken care of. Even a woman, who is mentally ill will be able to find a husband (OM). Sometimes, it will be both the husband and the wife who are very poor but sometimes, it is only one of them (OW).

Other:

The very poor are given old clothes by the community. They cannot buy clothes themselves (DM, OM, OW). They only have one cloth (OW) and they also cannot buy shoes. They look like they are mad (OM). They have no bike (DM). When their wives cook food to sell, nobody will buy it because they are so dirty. (OW)

Looking at the difference between the very rich and the very poor, again it is clear that the very rich are associated with positive words. They are described as being ‘loved, respected and obeyed’ and they have the ability to ‘make people happy’. The very poor are ‘not considered’ and people ‘pity’ them and ‘laugh at them’. They are ‘suffering’ and their ‘absence goes unnoticed’.

After describing the different categories, the participants were also asked to reflect on the distribution of the different categories in their villages. They did this by dividing ten stones amongst the five categories. Each stone represents 10% of the population. The following division was made:

Table 6 Perception of wealth category distribution in rural Nikki

	Very rich	Rich	Average	Poor	Very poor	Total
Older men	0%	0%	50%	30%	20% ¹⁶	100%
Older women	0%	0%	40%	40%	20%	100%
Younger men	0%	0%	60%	30%	10%	100%
Younger women	0%	20%	40%	30%	10%	100%
Male NGO beneficiaries	0%	10%	30%	40%	20%	100%
Female NGO beneficiaries	0%	0%	10%	70%	20%	100%
Total	0%	5%	38%	40%	17%	100%

The majority of the population in these villages is considered to be average and poor, followed by the very poor.

¹⁶ The older men placed one stone for the very poor (Nyaro) and one for the poorest (Saaro). In this table the two have been merged as one category; namely, the very poor.

Weddings and funerals

Weddings and funerals differ quite a bit amongst the different categories and are significant in revealing an individual's wealth. The villagers expressed the following differences in weddings and funerals:

Weddings

When the rich marry, they organize a big feast with plenty of different types of food and drinks. The bowls they use are free of dust, because they keep them in the closet. They can kill many cows and many people are invited, even from far away. It is common for guests to wear the same fabric. There is music, especially on the wedding day, so that the bride can dance. Pictures are taken and a calendar is made of those pictures. They can also make a movie of the wedding. The feast can continue for a month. Since the parents are rich, they do not need any financial assistance to organize the wedding. Therefore people may give food or firewood instead of money. The bride, however, receives money that is collected on a cloth. The rich can afford to give many things as dowry. Sometimes many suitcases are filled with clothes, veils, scarves, shoes, ointment, perfume, beauty products and jewelry. The Bariba also give money and animals. It is custom amongst the Bariba that an ox is given when people want to propose. The Fulani people will give a cow as dowry, which is not killed, but used for reproduction. They also give money.

The poor need assistance when they organize a wedding. Therefore it is important that the relatives are informed about the marriage. The poor can even borrow money for their weddings and pay back their debt by working for their money lenders. The feast is usually one day and it is mostly relatives that are invited, because the poor cannot afford to invite many people. They may only be able to slaughter two goats or less. They give fewer dowries than the rich. The poor Bariba need assistance from their families to arrange the ox that is needed to propose.

The very poor may not marry at all because of poverty. If a very poor man meets a woman, he can stay with her without getting married. Also, nowadays a man can make a lady pregnant and take her as his wife without marriage.

Funerals

The funerals of rich people are attended by many people. They can come from far, from Parakou, Cotonou and even France. They have enough money to organize the funeral themselves, they do not need help from anyone. The children of the deceased will also show that they have money. During the ceremony there will be plenty of food (many cows) and music. The dead are covered in a cloth, this is usually the same for rich and poor people. The Bariba will use a white cloth for a young person and black for an old person. The Fulani use a white cloth for everyone. The rich will bury their dead in their compounds. They will not bury their dead in the cemetery, out of fear that someone may steal the organs of the deceased. Their graves are well constructed with tiles and may be lit. Some will even bury their dead inside the house, this is especially the case for kings. The rich will have several ceremonies after the burial. They celebrate the 3rd, 7th and 40th day. Also, after a year they may hold a ceremony in memory of the deceased. This may continue for many years.

The poor, on the other hand, will usually complete all their ceremonies in one day and the ceremony may be organized months after the person has deceased. There are not many people who attend the funeral. The children of the deceased pray for their father or mother and they need assistance to organize the funeral. If they are assisted, they may

be able to buy a cow. Their relatives may bring cassava and maize. If there is no assistance, there will be no food.

Timeline: Perceptions about local history and important events

This exercise is intended to provide an overview of the initiatives that have been implemented in the area for approximately the last 30 years.

Table 7 Timeline: Perceptions about local history and important events in rural Nikki

Year	Project/initiative/intervention
1958	Cotton was introduced in the area by the government (OM)
1982	A school with a canteen was built in Tontarou, the initiator is unknown (YM)
1990s	Cashew nuts were introduced in the area by ICHOKAN (OM,DM)
1994	A store to stock fertilizer was constructed by CARDER (YM)
1994	Health insurance by CIDR in Ouenou (DM)
1995	A health project by RAS and the Suisse Corporation (OM)
1997	A dam was constructed in Tontarou, initiator unknown (YM)
1997	Project against Guinea worm by UNICEF in Ouenou (DM)
1997	Toilet and water pump constructed in Tontarou by PADEA (DM)
1997	Project against female circumcision in Tontarou, initiator unknown (DM)
1997	Cotton factory constructed in Tapa, initiator unknown (OW,DW)
1997	Primary schools constructed in Ouenou, initiator unknown (DW)
1999	A borehole was constructed in Tontarou (YM)
1999	Training for cashew nut production in Tontarou by ICHOKAN (YM)
1999	A building to produce shea butter was constructed in Tapa by Marie Kouro from Parakou (YW)
2000	The government constructed a school and a storage place for food in Tontarou (OM,OW, YM)

2000	Health centre was constructed by PAMER in Tontarou (YM)
2000	Project against domestic violence in Tapa, initiator unknown (DM)
2002	A project against forced marriage in Tapa, initiator unknown (DM)
2002	School canteen in Ouenou constructed by CRS (DM)
2002	Training to improve production by PADSE in Ouenou (DM)
2002	Microcredit for women in Ouenou for shea butter production (DM) by SIAN-SON
2002	Loans and savings project in Ouenou by CLCAM (DW)
2003	Financial support from the government (Fast Traque ¹⁷) to the communes. (OM)
2003	Help to school pupils in Tontarou by CAEF (DW)
2004	Cotton production (training) by AGROP in Tapa and Tontarou: Marketing of cotton (DM)
2004	A project in Tapa to raise awareness to stop the youth from migrating to Nigeria, initiator unknown (DM) ^{98ku}
2004	Literacy project by DERANA in Tontarou (DM)
2005	The government provided potable water to Tontarou. (OM)
2005	Assistance to set up a local radio station by ASCOM and the Suisse Corporation (OM)
2005	School supplies were distributed by LARES (OW,YM,DW)
2005	Soya production training in Tapa by Dedras (DM)
2005	Condoms were distributed in the area, initiator unknown (DM)
2006	Markets, schools and health centres were constructed by PNDCC and the Suisse Corporation (OM)
2006	Literacy project by CRS in Ouenou (DM)
2006	Toilet constructed in Ouenou by PADEA (DM)
2006	Health centre constructed in Ouenou by PNDCC (DM)

¹⁷ They did not specify the project, but Fast Traque usually helps communities to set up the infrastructure for their local markets.

2006	Awareness project to keep the village clean by PADEA (DM)
2007	Cashew nut production training in Tapa initiator unknown (DM)
2007	School supplies distributed to orphans in Tontarou by AGSP (DM)
2008	Seeds of Soybeans were distributed in Tontarou and Ouenou by Dedras (OM,YM,DM)
2008	Microcredit for women by the government and Dedras (OM)
2008	Potable water and literacy projects by HELVETAS (Suisse NGO) (OM)
2008	Microfinance by RENACA/CAVECA (OM)
2008	A pharmacy was built by ASC (YM)
2008	School was constructed in Tapa by RCRFCS-EPP/MEMP (YM,OW)
2008	Toilet constructed in Tapa by PADEA (DM)
2009	Machine for Gari production in Tontarou for school children, initiator unknown (OW,YW)
2009	Cashew nut training by Dedras (DM)
2009	Primary schools built in Tapa by CAEF (DW)
2009	Training on how to produce Soya by Dedras (DW)
2010	Improved hearths for the women by GiZ. Less charcoal and firewood is needed in these hearths (OM,OW)
2010	Loans and savings by CLCAM/RENECA (YM,YW)
2010	Microcredit for women in Tontarou by SIAN-SON (DW)
2011	HIV project by Plan Action Benin in Tontarou (YM)
2011	A well was dug in Tontarou, the initiator is unknown (YW)
2011	Machine for shea butter production in Ouenou by the government (OW,YM ,YW,DW) and Tontarou ¹⁸ (OW)
2011	A hospital was constructed in Ouenou by Sounon Sero (YW)
2011	Catholic church was constructed in Ouenou by the white fathers in Nikki (YW)
2011	MTN network pole was constructed, initiator

¹⁸ No longer functioning.

	unknown (YW)
2011	Literacy project by DERANA in Tapa (DM)
2012	Literacy project (Bariba and Fulani) by Dedras (OW,YM,YW,DM,DW)
2012	A building was constructed for literacy projects, the initiator is unknown (OW)
2012	A borehole was constructed in Tapa, the initiator is unknown (YM,OW)
2012	Seeds for Soya by Dedras in Tapa and Tontarou (YW)
2012	Seeds for Soya by John ¹⁹ in Tontarou (YW)
2012	A school was constructed in Ouenou, the initiator is unknown (OW,YW)
2012	A well was constructed in Tontarou by a Catholic father (YW)
Year unknown	Tap in Tontarou, initiator unknown (OW)
Year unknown	Water tank in Tontarou, initiator unknown (OW)

There is a wide range of initiatives that have been implemented since the 1950s. Different sectors of development can be found, such as education, health, water and sanitation, microcredit, religious initiatives and awareness initiatives; for example, against forced marriages.

Best and worst initiatives

After listing the initiatives, the participants were asked to rank the five best and best worst initiatives according to them.

Table 8 Best initiatives rural Nikki

Village	Initiatives and ranking	Reason to judge it positively
Old men		
All	1. Cotton farming, probably corporation Suisse	People earn more money now. They can afford tin roofs. This is much safer than the roofs of straw, which are vulnerable to fire.
All	2. Maize farming, probably corporation Suisse	There is sufficient food, because of the maize production.
All	3. Cashew nut production by	The cashew nuts are sold. The money is used to send the

¹⁹ A rich person in Nikki City.

	Dedras	children to school. People can also buy motorbikes from that money.
All	4. Literacy project by the Swiss Corporation	Those who have been taught to read and write are no longer cheated when they go to the market. They are able to read the prices, even in big stores in Parakou.
All	5. Potable water by PADEA	People no longer have to suffer from a lack of water.

Village	Initiatives and ranking	Reason to judge it positively
Old women		
Tontarou	1. Machine for Gari production for school children, initiator unknown	It benefits the whole community, especially the pupils who come from far away. They have their lunch at school and go home in the evening.
	2. Construction of a well by white priests	The whole community is benefiting from this well.
Ouenou	1. Machine to produce shea butter, initiator unknown	After three years, it is still functioning. The machine does everything, they no longer use their hands.
Tepa	No projects mentioned as good	

Village	Initiatives and ranking	Reason to judge it positively
Young men		
All	1. Loans and savings from CAVECA and CLCAM	People can borrow money when they are in need. They can borrow money to farm. And it is safer to keep their money there, instead of in their homes.
Tontarou	1. ²⁰ School building by PAMER	In the past people did not want their daughters to marry in Tontarou, because access to water was difficult. Moreover, there were no schools and there was no health centre.

²⁰ No order in the ranking, because these projects together led to a good changes; namely, that people from other villages will marry their daughters in Tontarou.

	1. Borehole PADEA	IDEM
	1. Health centre by PAMER	IDEM
	1. Building for literacy projects by Dedras	Before when it used to rain, they had to stop their class, now they can continue.
Ouenou	1. Literacy project by Dedras	The women know how to write and read, they are no longer dependent on other people to read their letters. Even in town, they can read the directions. They are not ignorant anymore.
	2. Health centre by the municipality	Now the women can give birth in the village and when the children are sick, they can be treated in the health centre.
	3. Machine for the production of shea butter	People do not have to use their hands anymore for the grinding.
Tepa	1. Literacy project by Dedras	Many people can write and read in Bariba and Fulani. For meetings held in Bariba, people can translate for those who speak only Fulani. Also, people cannot get lost because they can read directions in big towns.
	2. Soya production training by Dedras	Training on infants feeding, soya cheese, milk and many other products. ²¹
	3. Public toilet, initiator unknown	People no longer go to the toilet at on roadside. The village is much cleaner.

Village	Initiatives and ranking	Reason to judge it positively
Young women		
Tontarou	1. Borehole, initiator unknown	Any time people need water, it is available.
	2. Building for literacy projects, initiator unknown	The women have shelter now, they used to study in the sun.
Ouenou	1. A machine for the production of shea butter, initiator unknown	The women do not have to use their hands anymore. Using their hands used to give them wounds.

²¹ However, there is only one lady in the village (relative of the King) who knows how to produce these things and she is not always around.

	2. Building for literacy projects, initiator unknown	The women have shelter now, they used to study in the sun before.
	3. Loans by CLCAM	They can borrow money to start small-scale businesses.
	4. Hospital, initiator unknown	They can give birth in their village and receive vaccinations.
	5. MTN network, MTN	In the past people had to go to Nikki town to call someone.
	6. New church, white priests	Before the church was not so nice. People give compliments now.
Tepa	1. School building, initiator unknown	The children have shelter in the classrooms.

Village	Initiatives and ranking	Reason to judge it positively
NGO beneficiaries men		
Tontarou	1. School supplies for orphans by AGPS	It helps the orphans to be able to study.
	2. Soya project of Dedras	They can produce many things with the soybeans, e.g. milk and cheese.
	3. Literacy project DERANA	It has helped them to read and write in Bariba.
	4. Training of cotton production by AGROP	A training to improve the cotton production and marketing.
	5. Training for cashew nuts production by ICHOKAN	A training to improve the cashew nuts production.
Ouenou	1. Health insurance CIDR	They pay less at the hospital due to the insurance. They only pay half now.
	2. School canteen by CRS	The children eat at school and it prevents them from dropping out. In the past, some children would go home for lunch and not return.
	3. Health centre by PNDCC	The women can give birth in the village. They do not have to travel to Nikki town anymore.
	4. Soya project by Dedras	Women can produce many things with soya, cheese, milk and other things.

	5. Improving production by PADSE	Training on how to improve production in general.
Tepa	1. Public toilet by PADEA	People had travel to use the toilet before.
	2. Literacy project by Dedras	People can read and write now
	3. Cashew nuts project by Dedras	Training to improve the production.
	4. Project against migration of youth to Nigeria and forced marriages, initiator unknown	People sent their small children to work in Nigeria as housemaids. Before, women poisoned themselves because they had to marry someone they did not love.
	5. Training cotton production by AIC	Training to improve the cotton production.

Village	Initiatives and ranking	Reason to judge it positively
NGO beneficiaries women		
Tontarou	1. Microcredit from the government	It helps the women to solve their financial issues.
	2. School supplies for children by different NGOs	It helps the children to study. These NGOs also provide healthcare.
Ouenou	1. Machine for the production of shea butter	The work is done much quicker now. People from the surrounding villages come to use the machine and pay for it.
	2. Construction of the school, initiator unknown	Children of Ouenou and surrounding villages can go to school.
Tepa	1. Literacy project, initiator unknown	People can write and read. Even those who were reluctant to learn, want to learn now.
	2. Cotton factory, initiator unknown	The women can sell their products and make money.

Table 9 Worst initiatives rural Nikki

Village	Initiatives and ranking	Reason to judge it negatively
Old men		
All	1. Literacy project by SIAN-SON	They promised to build classrooms for literacy and the land had already been donated. However, still

		nothing has been built.
All	2. Repairing a rural road, initiator unknown	They asked for 1FCFA per kg of cotton (since people were selling cotton along the roadside, they refunded them, as they could not work) to repair the road for 5 years in a row. The road has not been repaired.

Village	Initiatives and ranking	Reason to judge it negatively
Old women		
Tontarou	1.Grinding mill by the municipality	It was a machine to grind shea nuts, maize and make gari. The people contributed money for this machine. The people had to give all the money they earned to the municipality. People who worked with the machine were not paid, they received only 3000 FCFA for six months of work. Finally the machine broke down.
Ouenou	1. Machine to produce shea butter, initiator unknown	Stopped working after three years of using it. It had some problems and people spent a lot of money for repairs, but it still does not function.
Tepa	Water pump, initiator unknown	They tried to construct a water pump, but it failed because there were stones everywhere in the ground.
	Machine for shea butter production, initiator unknown	A machine for shea butter production was promised to the community, but they never received it. They only received some pans and bowls.

Village	Initiatives and ranking	Reason to judge it negatively
Young men		
Tontarou	1. School building, initiator unknown	The building has still not been painted. It was built in 2000.
Tepa	1. Borehole by the municipality	The community has contributed 200000 FCFA for the drilling, but so far nothing has been done.

Group	Initiatives and ranking	Reason to judge it negatively
Young women		
Tontarou	1. Water pump and roads, politician	A politician (Bio Tchane) promised to construct roads and a pump, but he lied.
Ouenou	None	
Tepa	1. Water, initiator unknown	There is a big water problem in Tepa and someone promised to do something about it, but nothing has happened.

Group	Initiatives and ranking	Reason to judge it negatively
NGO beneficiaries men		
All	1. HIV project, initiator unknown	The money for this project was saved at CLCAM. However, the leaders of this project (the president, secretary and accountant elected from the village) went to CLCAM and they took the money. They could do this because they only needed three signatures to get the money.
Tepa	2. Water, initiator unknown, three different initiators	People always promise to bring water (wells, etc.) and the community contributes every time, but nothing is done.

Group	Initiatives and ranking	Reason to judge it negatively
NGO beneficiaries women		
	No bad projects mentioned	

Initiatives that are listed as worst are usually initiatives where the initiator failed to fulfil promises that were made or where initiatives are unfinished. In addition, initiatives that are dysfunctional (at this moment) are mentioned as worst initiatives.

Reaching the very poor

According to the participants, there are two responses to the question of whether the very poor are reached by development initiatives. Public initiatives seem to reach the very poor, for example streetlights. Everyone benefits from them, also the very poor. But most initiatives fail to reach the very poor. They reach the rich and the average. Participants said the following about this: *“There is a lot of corruption preventing the poorer groups from accessing development initiatives. The corruption was brought into the area by the whites, though you whites taught us how to be corrupt. The whites have meetings with the rich people, after which the rich claim ownership of the initiatives and do not let the poor enter. There is also political corruption; for example, a HIV initiative that was to be carried out in the area, but the poor people who wished to benefit from it did not belong to the same political party as the mayor and were excluded from the project. We heard that the money was transferred to rich people who were supposed to carry out HIV related activities, but they kept the money for private purposes.”* They added that not every organisation is corrupt. Some do actually go into the village to find out what is happening.

On the other hand, the very poor may also be reluctant to join initiatives. An example was raised which may show why the very poor themselves are hesitant to enter initiatives. In the shea butter processing initiatives, people work with machines to do the processing. There was only one very poor person who joined the initiative, but left very quickly. According to the participants, this person was afraid to be held responsible if something went wrong, i.e. something got stolen or a machine broke down.



A very poor family in Ouenou in front of the house they are currently staying in

Most important outcomes and conclusions

- The very poor are rarely reached.
- There is conscious and unconscious exclusion of the very poor. They are consciously excluded from economic initiatives for example, because the risk is thought to be too high. Unconsciously, the very poor exclude themselves as well. They have very low self-esteem, which, for example, prevents them from joining a village meeting about a new initiative.
- Especially the Bariba people have a very deterministic way of thinking. Things happen to them and you do not have the power to change it. It makes people passive and takes away the feeling of being responsible for something. Moreover, they wish to maintain things the way they are and please the spirits of their ancestors.
- Due to the heavy culture of fetishism, a feeling of fear and distrust permeates the roots of the society. In addition, the tension between different ethnicities also has an adverse effect on the development of the society and the collaboration between its people.

The studied NGO

- They have solid knowledge of the different wealth categories in their areas of focus.
- It is their vision and mission to target and reach the very poor. However, in practice they mostly reach the average.
- They do not actively target the very poor. The very poor are even excluded consciously, especially in the economic initiatives. The NGO's microcredit initiatives are organised in groups and the very poor often do not have access to these groups. They are isolated in their communities.
- The NGO applies an open access method for everyone interested in joining an initiative and they encourage the community to own the initiatives. Doing this, they do not take into account that it is very unlikely for the very poor to be invited to meetings on new initiatives. Community leaders 'confiscate' initiatives. The very poor do not have a say in village politics.

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