Shared management of common resources: strengthening local skills

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For many years, the aim of our work has been to get local organisations to be responsible for management of many development activities, by seeking to involve rural people in taking decisions in fields previously dominated by technicians, government departments and project managers. These include activities such as allocating funds, piloting projects, managing collective infrastructure and so on.

Generally speaking, environmental projects have been based on rules of management focusing on technical considerations, such as management plans. Such projects have themselves often set up local structures to act as the partner organisation, and to follow these externally constructed rules. Organisations built on such foundations are rarely viable: they have very little impact, sometimes even producing social and organisational effects quite contrary to those intended: "*by not relying on existing rules and bodies (be they informal, traditional chiefs, customary authorities etc.), we are in danger of undermining ways of controlling resources, rather than strengthening them. By not concerning ourselves with legitimate ways of exercising power, we are in danger of creating structures which, even if their objective is shared by the local people, are incapable of playing their intended role*" (Lavigne Delville, 1998).

Over the last decade, there have been a number of experiments to assist local actors to draw up collective rules for resource management. The aim of these efforts has been to encourage the emergence of local bodies[1], often informally constituted in the early stages, which can serve as platforms for negotiation and forums to bring together the various interests concerned. The objective is to support and give renewed dynamism to existing management structures, or gradually to build new ones by involving the various local decision-makers and representatives of different user groups.

In this paper, we shall take a general look at interventions of this type which have been supported by IRAM in different settings: Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad and Guinea. We begin with an analysis of the issues surrounding shared management of common resources and the challenges they present, which provides an opportunity to examine certain key concepts, such as management of renewable resources for long term sustainability. We shall then see what lessons can be learned from earlier development projects. Finally, we shall take a more detailed look at one pilot project, analysing progress and asking how

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[1] Comité paritaires (joint committees), forum départementaux (forums organised at "département" level), commissions mixtes (mixed committees), commissions paysannes (farmers' committees), forums for negotiating forms of land tenure.

best to support the emergence of local bodies involved in regulating common resources.

SHARED MANAGEMENT OF COMMON RESOURCES: THE CHALLENGES

Renewable resources and collective infrastructure

These are the two main forms of resource which local collective organisations are called to manage at village, inter-village and local government level.

Land tenure and renewable resources

The collective management issues faced by the rural people with which we work are still very much centred on natural resources: access to and the fertility of cultivated land, water, grazing areas, forestry resources (wood, leaves, fruits), and the products of fishing and hunting. Control over who has access to and use of these resources depends on prevailing land tenure systems. Beyond the question of who can use land for agriculture, there is a vast and complex set of rules governing access to shared resources by different communities or user groups: use of water points in pastoral areas, grazing of crop residues and the routes taken by livestock through agricultural areas, gathering of fruit in woodland areas, and fishing in lakes and rivers.

The shared management of common resources is closely related to land use practices. In the Sahel, the same area may be used by several different groups over the seasons, access to resources and their management being as a result "*a social product, the subject of divergent interests and of conflict*" (Pillot, 1998).

Rather than "natural resources", some environmental economists such as J. Wéber (1995) prefer to use the term "renewable resources", calling into question the idea of predictable "stocks" of resources that can be rationally exploited. "*Being renewable, they are subject to great variability, both natural and anthropic. Moreover, it is not realistic to think of a living resource in isolation from the other resources with which it interacts within an ecosystem…*". A distinction therefore needs to be made between renewable natural resources and non-renewable natural resources. "… *what is normally referred to as the economics of natural resources does not take into account the economics of renewable resources*".

Management and funding of collective infrastructures

The monetarisation of local economies and the provision of infrastructure and equipment to rural communities have generated new responsibilities for their

management. Whether such infrastructures are social (schools, dispensaries, wells, bore-holes) or productive (drainage systems, irrigation works, access roads…), they require a means by which their day-to-day use and access on the part of different types of user can be regulated. In addition, thought is needed regarding the community's ability to cover the costs of running, maintaining and repairing such investment. It is therefore necessary to support a community organisation with financial competence as well as technical management functions.

The decentralisation process has given local government organisations responsibility for the management of certain common resources: renewable resources, infrastructure and local taxation. It has also brought new actors onto the local scene, with newly elected representatives needing to find a role and establish their legitimacy vis-à-vis pre-existing decision-making bodies, such as village councils, or traditional leaders.

Customary bodies and elected representatives

Bodies more active than current ideas of social breakdown would suggest

Local level research shows that most rural communities continue to operate through institutions and resource management systems which are "*efficient, fair and sustainable, thereby succeeding in reconciling social needs with the ecological conditions required for maintaining renewable resources*" (Mathieu, Freudenberger, 1996). But they are not always able to cope with the growing imbalance between the use of resources to generate income and preserve the potential for regeneration of the resources themselves.

This imbalance can be explained by a number of factors: a rapid increase in the pressure on land without sufficient incentives for intensification, contradictions between modern regulations put in place by government and traditional land tenure systems, and the gradual fragmentation of rural societies… In parallel, the number of actors involved in resource management has grown in recent years, with the emergence of farmer organisations, NGOs, and local elected representatives playing an active part in protecting the environment.

Some people consider customary organisations to be "on their way out", losing influence in the field of land and resource management. By contrast, other commentators have pointed to signs that local structures are gradually transforming themselves in line with social change: "*The 'customary' institution of the palaver has undergone (…) profound structural changes while remaining faithful to the principle of giving everyone an opportunity by which to express themselves and analyse a situation before the acknowledged authority takes a final decision; the quality of this decision, and of the person who formulates it,*

depends on how different view points are reconciled with customary law, and the importance of precedent. Far from being ossified, the palaver as an institution has proved able to include representatives of religious and political organisations, open itself to new groups (young people, women), and adapt to urbanisation. It adapting to the new realities, it has managed to avoid becoming obsolete" (Debouvry, 1997).

Where land tenure management is concerned, in-depth studies show that 'customary authorities' still play a very important role in managing, regulating and supervising users. "*Land tenure conflicts are often resolved at the village level with the help of customary institutions... Most of the major conflicts between villages are settled in the* chef de *canton's court. In all regions (including those where there was no pre-colonial centralised political organisation), the mission noted that this colonial function had been maintained or reactivated*" (CIRAD/SAR, World Bank).

The way in which these customary bodies take decisions is not without its faults or constraints. Above all, they can be criticised for their inegalitarian character, which is said to marginalise certain interest groups: young people, women, and groups lacking clout in terms of social and political status. They are also criticised for not dealing firmly enough with conflict. But, when all is said and done, this lack of vigour is not unique to local land tenure-management bodies; the same criticism could be made of other local institutions, whether locally elected or appointed by government.

Promoting a strictly community-based mode of local organisation is not without risks, as it may lead to people withdrawing into their own sense of identity, closing themselves to the outside world and rejecting other social groups. It may then lead to tensions between different groups such as herders, farmers and migrants, as A. Marty has pointed out (1995). It is therefore important to insist on the "intercommunity" dimension of local bodies, which can be defined as acknowledging a "*relationship of territorial proximity between groups which may or may not be of the same ethnic composition, between which there is both complementarity and competition*".

We are therefore concerned with Sahelian organisations which have for many years been based on principles of reciprocity between user groups. This reciprocity continues to play a fundamental role in achieving some sort of harmony between the availability of resources – pastoral resources in particular – and the demands upon them, and in building a system of intercommunity solidarity, which is so essential given the climatic unpredictability of these regions.

"Adopting an intercommunity approach means ensuring that the major problems are analysed together, that decisions are taken openly, that the choices are understood and accepted, and that those who lose will gain some form of compensation. This pre-supposes meetings between representatives of the different interest groups belonging to the various communities involved."

The intercommunity approach also provides an essential forum for the settlement and prevention of conflicts. *"A place for learning to respect other communities as well as the individuals who belong to them, intercommunity meetings are, … at local level, the best possible means of devising mechanisms for settling conflicts without violence. They could become a place to seek reconciliation and peace, and practice democracy and citizenship."*

The advent of new forms of local government

Alongside the traditional organisations which in the past have overseen land tenure matters, new types of collective organisation have begun to emerge with the setting up of decentralised local government ("*Communes*" in Mali, "*Communautés Rurales de Développement*" in Guinea). As the traditional power structures lose their influence, new collective management structures are emerging which are not as yet capable of exercising their designated functions[2]. If they are to do so, they need better knowledge of the territory they are supposed to be administering. These local councils of elected representatives also need to be able to instigate local debate on the priorities to be adopted in matters of conservation and the development of their area.

The biggest challenge in this field is therefore to facilitate the transition from the traditional guarantors of control of resources to the new collective management structures that have resulted from decentralisation policies.

The main challenges of intercommunity management

Those aiming to support intercommunity management face three main challenges: methodological, technical and political.

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[2] In Mali, the legal texts stipulate that local councils should deliberate on environmental protection, occupation plans and operations to develop communal lands, state-land management and land tenure, and the acquisition of land.

Methodological challenges: management of common resources and decision-making by consensus

a. towards management of the natural heritage

Support measures for local organisations need to be introduced to encourage negotiated management of common resources. The concept of heritage seems to be "*an increasingly important notion, especially in the field of environmental law and in the approach to land tenure… In origin, the word has a domestic connotation: it refers to the father's portion, or inheritance, which is handed on (material goods, but also status and more symbolic aspects).*" (Marty, 1996). It introduces two interesting ideas: that of seeking to identify the "common interest" of different groups, and that of "rational management" with the long term in mind.

Management of the natural heritage is concerned to ensure the "common heritage" is fairly managed and handed on to future generations. It also calls into question the idea that private property is the only long-term solution. As a concept it also has the merit of providing a plural vision of uses and users, as well as linking up the heritage of the past, the needs of the present, and the interests of future generations. It is therefore a good basis for negotiation between the various actors. It has also been found rural people tend to react favourably when problems are properly discussed before decisions are taken, and when flexible ways of doing things are adopted instead of the rigid solutions imposed from outside.

b. the search for consensus as a system for taking decisions

There is a need to build decision-making systems based on achieving consensus to ensure equitable and sustainable access for different categories of user who often have contradictory interests.

The management of renewable natural resources depends on a complex body of rules established by local groups – rules established over time to resolve how best to regulate access to land, grazing and harvesting of wild products… The definition of these rules, their supervision and adjustment, depend on local organisations acting under the authority of traditional institutions. These organisations rarely act without having obtained widespread support for the decisions that need to be taken, by seeking the advice of councillors, village headmen and various local interests. In seeking to reinforce local management capacities, we therefore think it very important to strengthen these consensual decision-making systems.

One of the specific challenges is therefore to promote decision-making systems involving as wide a representation as possible of the various interest groups concerned. The aim is to facilitate consensual decision-making processes which bring together parties whose ways of thinking are often potentially in conflict.

But in situations of serious conflict regarding resources, when violence gets the upper hand over discussion, is this search for consensus realistic and can it succeed? This question points to the close connections between consensus, mediation and arbitration, and raises the issue of which institution should perform such arbitration.

c. multi-user analysis

The quest for consensus is all the more important in that it involves interest groups which, in terms of their power and influence within local societies, are often very unbalanced. The challenge is therefore to ensure, by negotiation, that the interests of minority social groups – small farmers, herders, women, young people – are taken into account.

This presupposes an analysis of the different groups concerned, their specific interests, the value they ascribe to a particular resource, and the potential areas of conflict or co-operation between the different types of actor. Accounting for the diversity of users and analysing their strategies is a familiar aspect of development research. More specifically, this type of "multi-user analysis" (Castellanet, 1999) has been the subject of theoretical study by environmental economists to assess the value of a given resource for different users, and so arrive at the most appropriate decision (Pearce et al., 1989). The concept has also been used by researchers concerned with business management as a way of evaluating the interests and reactions of various actors to proposals for strategic changes in the way a business is organised. *"The main advantage of this method of multi-user analysis is that it makes it possible to evaluate the consequences and possible reactions of users to the various possible decisions which could affect natural resources. It is therefore essentially a method designed to help experts, project directors and decision-makers in evaluating the efficacy, practicality and realism of different options."* (Castellanet, 1999).

d. managing shared resources through mediation

The quest for consensus between a plurality of users and decision-makers leads naturally to the adoption of a system of "negotiated management of the natural heritage", which is already practised in certain "village land management" and "natural resource management" projects (Marty, 1996). With regard to this issue, Wéber (1996) has proposed a "mediation" process based on Ostrom's work. In particular, he stresses the importance that needs to be given to analysing the changing ways in which resources are managed and used in situations where it seems difficult to reconcile conservation and development.

"The very long-term collective point of view, without which any local action is bound to fail, implies the organisation of negotiations, and therefore of mediation between the various representatives of past, present and future. A

mediator is essential; his task will be to lead a process of dialogue and negotiation, the results of which must include:

- very long-term objectives (one generation),
- scenarios for medium-term management, and their ecological, economic, social and institutional aspects,
- the formation of a negotiated management structure".

Technical challenges: developing viable systems

It is a major challenge for development workers to identify sustainable ways of exploiting resources which ensure the regeneration of productive potential and at the same time meet the needs of users. The "sustainable" development model has been much criticised, and a concept of viable development increasingly put in its place. "*The fundamental distinction between viable development and sustainable development is that the former rejects arguments based on the concept of equilibrium and the management of stocks... This concept of sustainability stems from biological models which represents a resource as evolving in a balanced fashion, exploited by human beings, this exploitation itself following a linear pattern of growth... As a result of our scientific education, many people quite logically have come to see sustainable development in terms of preserving the environment in unchanged form, or in terms of "maintaining" or "restoring equilibrium". This is the underlying rationale of programmes to manage biodiversity involving protected areas, forests and listed sites* "(Wéber, 1995).*

The intrusion of variability, uncertainty and irreversibility into environmental systems forces us to consider development in terms of managing the interactions between economic, social, and natural variables, in both time and space. This kind of analysis proposes a more dynamic vision of management and marks a departure from conventional thinking on conservation, which is concerned with stocks of resources. Methods of exploitation are now seen as stemming from the general objectives of the users, and the social and economic influences of the local setting. A broader-based analysis of changes to production systems is needed to find alternatives – particularly economic alternatives – to the practices of the users concerned.

The notion of viable development is akin to the concept of "vivification" found in Muslim land tenure law. Muslim law emphasises that it is unacceptable to prevent access to natural resources. Natural resources are regarded as the gift of God, as opposed to the product of human labour, which can be owned. It also enshrines the idea that the natural world, the land and its resources belong to those who give life to them by working the land, grazing animal, etc. This concept is far richer than the Western concept of "development", which is based on commercialisation of products derived from the soil.

Political challenges

Participatory eco-development

Inspired by early experience of village land management, some approaches have broken new ground in taking land tenure issues into account more directly. "*Recognition of the rights of communities over the natural resources of their territory is one of the bases of participatory eco-development*" (Lazarev, 1993). The emphasis on a social/land tenure approach is an interesting innovation. However, early experiments in practical implementation show that it only works if project operators have been adequately trained in negotiating skills. (Grigori Lazarev, Micheau, 1997).

Empowerment: reinforcing local management capacities

The directions being taken in various countries in matters of local development and decentralisation demonstrate the need to strengthen decision-making capacity for the leaders responsible for collective resource management at local level. Collective bodies need to possess particular technical and political capacities:

- knowledge of the area and its resources, how they are changing, and the purposes to which they may be put,
- the ability to settle conflicts of interest between users, to arbitrate, and make choices which take account of both the short and medium term,
- the ability to define common rules for exploiting resources which are technically viable and socially acceptable,
- the ability to ensure compliance with these rules on the part of users, and apply the agreed sanctions to those who break them,
- the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of these rules and amend them if necessary.

Improving resource management depends on strengthening existing organisational capacities: starting from an awareness of current weaknesses, defining priorities with respect to territory and resources, and helping to implement suitable arbitration procedures and measures (access to water points, protection of threatened species, opening grazing areas for transhumance…). But it is also essential that the State, donor organisations and administrators give these bodies the right to define their own strategies and direction.

LESSONS DRAWN FROM EXPERIENCE WITH NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

We shall now take a critical look at initiatives carried out by development projects and see what pointers they offer to the future. We shall consider the general situation, and recent approaches adopted to support the emergence of local decision-making and regulatory bodies.

A review of experience

Early projects which aimed to support users organising themselves to manage common resources were principally in the field of irrigation[3]. Most of these projects chose to set up new structures, as generally some form of collective organisation was needed to manage the allocation of land and the distribution of water among users on a sustainable basis. However, the lack of clear links between these organisations and the local structures exerting authority over the rest of village affairs was often a limiting factor in the success of such projects.

It is also noticeable that most village land management projects have concentrated on physical development activities, rarely venturing into riskier areas which would call for delicate negotiations between local vested interests. This would not matter if such development projects had a neutral impact on existing methods of exploitation. Stone bunds, "*tassas*" and "*zaï*", for example, make it possible to develop previously uncultivated areas. These techniques are effective development tools, but the way they are used differs from one village community to another. Such techniques have been adopted above all by better-off farmers, who see them as a good way of strengthening their hold over the land (by building stone bunds which obstruct the circulation of livestock, by purchasing abandoned plateau lands for cultivation using *tassas, etc.*).

In the field of collective management, there is no particular organisational model to promote, each situation presenting different relationships and power struggles between the local authorities and various user groups. It is important to be aware of this if one is to identify effective, viable ways of strengthening local institutions.

Generally speaking, four major factors have conspired to produce a number of difficulties which these projects have had to face:
- Those who conceived the projects did not pay sufficient attention to existing systems of organisation and management, whether in the diagnostic stages leading up to the initiatives or in evaluating their impact.

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[3] There have been other forms of community organisation in the past, such as the Sociétés Indigènes de Prévoyance (native provident societies) around 1910, but they were originally set up to manage stocks of seeds.

- The project organisers took little account of issues at the supra-village level. The projects were generally restricted to the village level: village community, district or specific interest groups.
- A lack of management tools to enable project workers and farmers to think in concrete terms about the organisation of the village area and complementary ways in which its resources could be used.
- Finally, it is important to underline the often ambiguous position and role of the Government. They have rarely been willing to see limits put on their prerogatives in the interests of a real decentralisation of natural resource management.

Support for the emergence of local institutions

Taking the above lessons into account, we have experimented with two main types of organisational change, which could make a significant contribution to reinforcing local capacities for managing community resources.

Problems with village land management projects

The first option has been to strengthen village resource management structures. This resulted in initiatives to set up Village Land Management Committees (*Comités de Gestion des Terroirs Villageois*), which were more or less formalised, depending on the country concerned. It is undeniable that these "village land management" approaches have led to greater involvement by local people in diagnostic work and in the implementation of projects to develop village lands. But they have risked failure when the attempt to set up new structures, such as the Village Land Management Committees, has been too rapid. An in-depth knowledge of local power structures and a less systematic approach are needed if one is to avoid setting up structures without real influence in the village or power over resources, and to avoid marginalising traditional structures (Reij, Scoones, Toulmin, 1996).

Local management bodies at the inter-village level

More recently, a number of project have taken a direct interest in community resource management, including grazing, water, forests, fauna, woodland, and fisheries. Approaches of this kind give increasing importance to institutions and management systems set up by local communities and try to organise local initiatives according to traditional management models. The ways in which such

projects are implemented differ considerably[4], depending on the situation prevailing at the outset. They frequently rely on existing structures, breathing new life into them if necessary, and helping them adapt to new contexts.

The local committees that have been established have concentrated mainly on economic and social initiatives, which they have been led to define, fund and oversee. But these local consultative bodies could also represent and provide a plateform for the divergent interests of local populations as a means of making progress in finding solutions and improving the management of natural resources (Tallet, 1997). Examples can be taken from the management of funding in the case of the FIL, mediation between sedentary and transhumant communities in the case of the Almy Bahaï m project, and definition of the rules for the management of territory in the Mayo Kebbi area[5].

REVIEW OF CURRENT WORK IN THE MAYO KEBBI REGION

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[4] The joint management bodies being supported in this way go by various names: *forum départementaux* (departmental forums) associated with the PDRI/HKM and *comités paritaires* (joint committees) in the Ganzourgou region in Burkina Faso, *comité cantonaux* (cantonal committees) associated with the PGTF in Niger, *commission paysanne* (farmers' committees) and *associations intervilageoises* (inter-village associations) associated with the FIL/PGT in southern Mali, *instances locales d'orientation et de décision* (local steering and decision-making bodies) in the Mayo Kebbi region, *commissions mixtes* (mixed committees) and *comités paritaires* (joint committees) for managing water points in Tchad, *comités de suivi* (supervisory committees) associated with the PADL and *collèges transitoires d'arrondissement* (transitional arrondissement colleges) in northern Mali for re-establishing peace and promoting development, *commissions de gestion de fonds infrastructures villageoises* (management committees for inter-village infrastructure funds) in the area around Bangui (Central African Republic), *forum de négotiation des maîtrises foncièrs* (forums for negotiating land tenure matters) promoted by some of the land tenure plans in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin.
[5] Conservation and Natural Resources Management Project in the Mayo Kebbi region, run by the ECO-IRAM grouping on behalf of the GTZ, and funded by BMZ. PN : 96 2282.0 (1994-2006).

This programme[6], focusing on the conservation of natural resources, is being conducted in an unusual context from an agro-ecological, economic and social point of view. For the purposes of comparison, it is important to stress the main variables: savannah region, cotton-based economy, decentralisation not yet undertaken, influential centralised customary structures, dynamic farmers' organisations, generally a very active community movement, and a high proportion of literate men.

Principles on which the current initiative is based

The concept of a Local Steering and Decision-making Body (Instance Locale d'Orientation et de Décision)[7] is based on three principles:
- starting with existing management organisations and improving their capacity and effectiveness, while avoiding the creation of new structures too dependant on the project;
- promoting dialogue and negotiation between different categories of users, so that the activities undertaken strengthen links between communities;
- encouraging the gradual learning of new methods of operation and decision-making by existing local organisations.

The project therefore seeks to reinforce four essential functions which will enable local organisations to think out, implement and follow up a strategy for natural resource management:

    a. Overall guidelines for managing resources: defining the issues and the major problems that need solving, drawing up precise work and management programmes, defining and tailoring appropriate incentives.

    b. Executive and operational decisions in accordance with the general guidelines defined above: choice of villages and constitution of local bodies, dealing with requests for support, analysing their feasibility and decisions to grant funding.

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[6] The Project covers four of the sub-prefectures in the southern part of the Mayo-Kebbi (the western part of Chad's Sudan region): Pala, Fianga, Binder and Léré. It extends over 15.057 km2, approximately 2000 km2 of which are protected areas (Binder-Léré wildlife reserve, Yamba-Berté listed forest). There was estimated to be a population of approximately 540.000 inhabitants in 1998, living in some 450 villages.

[7] This term is deliberately vague, or at least general, from a concern to adapt to the diverse situations and avoid the danger of institutionalising these organisations too soon. It encapsulates four of the essential elements behind the concept: Body (expressing a degree of solemnity given the authorities it brings together and the nature of the decisions they take), Local (as an organisation it focuses on a limited territory, covering several communities), Steering (a joint project concerned with the future of this territory and the management of its resources), Decision-making (concrete decisions are taken to regulate the management of natural resources and fund development and management measures).

> *c. **Monitoring of community rules:*** monitoring and evaluation of the various measures and their impacts, monitoring and supervision of financial management.
>
> *d. **Mediation between user groups:*** management and prevention of conflicts, imposing sanctions in the event of community management rules not being respected.

The intercommunity organisations being set up bring together village representatives, customary land managers, socio-professional bodies (fishermen, hunters, farmers, herders) and the local associations formed to conserve resources. These fora constitute a first opportunity for debate on the management rules in force in inter-village areas in which one or more common resource gives rise to particular issues: lakes in the Mayo Kebbi region, wildlife reserves and inter-village forest areas, catchment basins. The procedure being followed includes the drawing up of a management charter confirming or redefining the rules for management and use, as well as setting out the methods of supervision, sanction and mediation.

Activities to strengthen farmer organisations

Starting from the guidelines defined by these local bodies, steps have been taken to support the implementation of management measures by different groups of local actors (42 villages and producer groups, 3 user organisations and environmental protection associations)[8]. These activities make it possible to broaden the repertoire of technical measures for managing the six core resources at the heart of the local economy: land (improved fallows, alley cropping, compost, regeneration of stands of *Acacia albida*), forest (planting of forest/fruit trees, protection of gallery forests, and prevention of fires), grazing (sinking of water points, organising routes for transhumance), fish (regulation, protection of areas used for spawning, conservation), wildlife (protection of animals that are hunted), and water (protection of springs and river banks).

In practice, the decisions so far taken by these bodies have been concerned chiefly with establishing the main guidelines and the programming of the activities mentioned above in their particular area of interest. To facilitate progress in the time periods between general assembly meetings, each body has appointed a smaller executive council, the composition of which reflects current

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[8] In the first phase, the implemetation measures resulted in the realisation of 152 local natural resources management projects at the village and inter-village level involving investment of 30 million francs CFA.

priorities. Many of their members are traditional chiefs[9], motivated by a desire to improve natural resource management in their home territories, who alone have the weight to ensure that the measures and rules negotiated with the different users are actually implemented.

Initial impacts

It is too early to observe significant impacts, but there are signs which already point towards interesting short-term benefits (ECO-IRAM collective, 1998). The involvement of participants in a series of meetings, the lively debates that have taken place, the mass attendance of village representatives, the fact that the *canton* hosting the assembly has taken responsibility for its logistical organisation… these are all pointers to the first indisputable signs of success of the initiative taken in October 1997. The conditions for a real sustained debate between the various local parties involved in natural resource management have been fulfilled. It should also be noted that some villages have spontaneously implemented programmed activities without waiting for support from the project.

It is also worth stressing the advantages of this type of joint experiment in analysis and planning methods. There is no denying that it forces each party to look afresh at the area and its resources, the ways in which conditions are deteriorating, and how such deterioration can be addressed. *"We have learned to think in a different way"*, explained one farmer at Yapala who heads a committee responsible for the management of wildlife set up by the local body in Dari *canton.*

The setting up of these local bodies has led to a closer relationship between State technical services, local traditional chiefs and socio-professional organisations. The first positive result has been greater awareness of the respective mandates of the different parties concerned. People also see the advantages of formulating and abiding by common management rules. At the present stage in the process, the local bodies being supported are not new institutions on the local scene. Rather, they bring together the local parties already concerned with resource management. Together, they have learned new ways to debate the direction to be taken and decisions to be made regarding access to common areas or territory and resources.

Issues raised by this initiative

[9] Chefs de canton take the chair in most cases. In one case, this function was performed by the president of the fishermen's associations (Lake Youé management body).

The implementation of this initiative in the Mayo Kebbi region has raised a number of issues, mainly regarding the duration and powers of such bodies.

Establishing the legitimacy of these new bodies

The overlap in areas of competence of these bodies with those of other administrative bodies may lead to conflict. In this particular case, the *canton* and inter-*canton* levels play a vital role and determine the involvement of local decision-making centres. In situations where decentralised local government institutions are being set up, the issue of how these should relate to existing customary organisations is a thorny one[10].

How different groups of actors and users are best represented is a recurring issue in experiments with organisations intended to foster greater local democracy. Generally speaking, the mandate of the "representative" of the village or organisation concerned is still very vague. The method and criteria for appointing representatives have been left to the discretion of each village. But the connection between the representatives who attend the assemblies and their constituencies needs to be strengthened by defining their functions more precisely. Marginal groups may help to improve their analysis of the situation, and so give them a clearer idea of their own interests and the strategies they might adopt. Only then can these groups become more effectively involved, as has emerged from experience in Latin America (Castellanet, 1999).

The composition of the executive committee appointed by each local assembly seems well suited to the functions of guidance and mediation, but at the present time the mandate of such bodies needs to be more accurately defined (Demante, Nsabimana, 1998). Should they, for instance, limit themselves to secretarial tasks and spreading information? Should they also be responsible for preparing and directing assembly meetings? Should they, in addition, have decision-making powers? All these questions need to be considered carefully by the project team, then at the forthcoming assembly meetings.

Decision-making systems and powers

In the present phase, project workers and local representatives are together learning a new process for discussing how best to manage community resources. It is not always easy to distinguish between information which the project wishes to share with the assemblies and proposals on which it expects representatives of the local body to take a formal position. The debates which take place demonstrate that these representatives want to be involved in defining

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[10] This is particularly true in Niger, where traditional chiefs are politically powerful.

the main points of policy, but ways of making decisions are still insufficiently formalised. This can give rise to a great deal of uncertainty regarding the effective involvement of local communities in the application of any such resolutions agreed.

The viability of such measures depends first of all on the commitment of the different user groups at the time when the rules are drawn up. Considerable time and effort have to be invested to achieve consensus about the measures to be undertaken and ensure the rules are considered legitimate (process of dialogue and working out the rules with different groups, validation and collective commitment to implementing the new regulations, including monitoring procedures…).

Another major difficulty in implementing natural resource management systems is how to monitor the application the rules governing use of the natural environment. This is particularly true when the measures concerned tend to restrict the access rights of users (establishing protected areas, temporary closure of a resource…). In the Mayo Kebbi region, it is worrying to see the return of surveillance methods involving militias serving the interests of *chefs de cantons* or peasant organisations (fishermen in particular). This heightens the natural tendency to exclude outsiders (transhumant herders, fishermen and hunters from neighbouring areas…)[11]. Mistrust of State-sponsored law-and-order systems is so great that local farmers tend to take on themselves the function of the rural police. The question of who has power to enforce the rules established by broad consensus brings us to the little studied field of how to define functions and control mechanisms for local organisations and representatives of the State.

Financial autonomy and institution building

The importance of external funding in supporting these processes of local dialogue is also problematic. Are the persons involved mainly motivated by the desire to secure project subsidies, even if they are very limited, as in this case? One is mindful of the way in which other local development bodies have run out of steam. Thought must be given to setting up arrangements to ensure that the costs of each of these local bodies is gradually covered. They need to find ways to increase their self-funding (taxation of use of resources, finding new sources of external funding). This is a challenge that has to be met if these farmers' organisations are to become more independent and less reliant ton a single project.

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[11] There is a danger of the identity reflex encouraged by the heritage approach mentioned earlier being misdirected in this situation.

The prospects for strengthening and multiplying these local bodies are as yet uncertain. This experiment should help us to identify the best ways of organising renewable resource management in future. Given the slow progress with decentralisation in Chad at present, it is not yet clear whether these local bodies might form the basis for new local government structures or broader-based associations bringing together members of local government bodies as well as representatives of voluntary associations and professional structures.

Establishing mechanisms for follow up

Mechanisms for following up such arrangements have yet to be established and represent a priority area for research. What is the best way of monitoring the perceptions of different user groups about the organisations that are emerging and the rules they are drawing up? How can one best observe the positions and strategies adopted by the different local actors in the various negotiation underway?

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