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**Creating Local Democratic
Politics from Above:
The "Gestion des Terroirs"
Approach in Burkina Faso**

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Creating Local Democratic Politics from Above: The "Gestion des Terroirs" Approach in Burkina Faso

Introduction

Decentralisation and people's participation have become primary preoccupations within development efforts. Although the two concepts cover distinctively different grounds, some of the same considerations underlie their popularity. One is that democracy, as an end in itself, could be enhanced through the delegation of authority to bodies more directly responsible to citizens. It is presumed that citizens are more likely to observe rules and decisions made by decentralized structures in which they are offered the possibility of participating. Furthermore, policies are considered to be more appropriate to local conditions if people participate in a decentralized decision-making process.

This line of reasoning is also suggested in discussions of natural resource management. Central governments have failed to manage natural resources effectively; people at the local level know better how to handle the resources they exploit; resource users have stronger incentives to manage resources with care than government officials; and effective management has to take the specificities of each location into account.

Such arguments have resulted in proposals to delegate the management of natural resources to local communities and organizations. A wave of initiatives to decentralize environmental activities has swept most of francophone West Africa. In Burkina Faso a "gestion des terroirs" (land management) programme based on these principles was launched in 1986, with few prior studies of how planning and implementation of resource management activities are carried out in local communities.

The field work which forms the basis of this discussion was undertaken in four villages during nine months in 1993. A number of conclusions have emerged which question basic elements of the "gestion des terroirs" programme. Firstly, the programme acknowledges that villagers know more about the local environment than government officials, yet it assumes that people do not utilize their knowledge to manage natural resources carefully. The conclusion drawn is that it is necessary to create new village councils, which have to be representative, as a *sine qua non* for natural resource management at the local level. Thereby, existing local institutions for decision-making and resource management are overlooked.

Next, it is recognized that there are diverse interests in relation to natural resources among different social groups such as farmers and pastoralists, women and men, youngsters and elders. However, the implications of these social groupings are recognised only to a very limited extent, and a significant difference between the interests of the leaders and the non-leaders is totally ignored.

Third, the activities under the "gestion des terroirs" programme are based on the idea that natural resource management is a major problem, although in reality the development of the village infrastructure is often a more significant concern. Villagers tend to regard resource management councils as an instrument for attracting funds and infrastructure improvements. Furthermore, there is no evidence supporting the belief that improvements desired by the villagers and supplied by projects or NGOs can be traded for careful local management of natural resources along the lines laid out by the "gestion des terroirs" approach. People do not enter into labour intensive resource conservation activities unless they are profitable within the foreseeable future.

Finally, the aims of the "gestion des terroirs" programme and the projects under its auspices are ambiguous, to the extent that they seek to combine environmental concerns with an ambition to democratize village life. Although it is argued that various social groups use

natural resources differently and, accordingly, representative resource management bodies have to be established, there is no doubt that the two goals are partially conflicting.

The discussion in this paper is organized in three sections. The context in which the "gestion des terroirs" programme takes place is introduced. There is a short description of the four villages where the field work was undertaken. The issues raised earlier are then discussed, questioning the need for new local organizations of a representative nature.

The Burkinabé frame

Burkina Faso is one of the African countries that has experienced a so-called democratization of political institutions during the last few years. A new constitution was adopted in 1991; elections for the presidency and the parliament were held. The former military leader, Blaise Compaoré, was elected president, and his party holds a comfortable majority in the parliament. Despite its landlocked position and widespread poverty (per capita GDP around \$319 in 1992) the country has experienced some economic growth over the last decade, in contrast to most of the region, and it is considered to be well-governed (Africa Research Bulletin 1994).

Decentralisation of authority has been discussed, with the country divided into 30 provinces and a number of municipalities, which are officially financially autonomous. The roughly 300 departments and 7000 villages act as administrative subdivisions. A recent bill dictated the need for village councils (GOBF 1993) and national conferences on decentralisation in natural resource management to be held regularly .

The "Programme National de Gestion des Terroirs", started in 1986, aims to create councils in charge of natural resource management in all villages. These councils are supposed to cooperate with government officers in order to reverse the trends towards degradation

and to secure sustainable uses of natural resources. Additionally, the establishment of village boundaries and the zoning of village lands according to their use (farming, livestock keeping, wood collection, etc.) is carried out. The idea is to separate conflicting uses of natural resources and to implant the concern that resources are not inexhaustible.

Decentralization is on the agenda, but its implementation is slow. The ruling party is not enthusiastic, and the bureaucratic culture does not facilitate much the delegation of certain functions. Hence, village councils established under the "gestion des terroirs" programme often risk being overruled or undermined by forestry department agents, prefects and other government officers.

The economic crisis makes it impossible for the state to initiate almost any new activity without the support of some donor agency. This makes decentralization very difficult because the delegation of authority to lower levels without the concomitant transfer of financial resources is futile. Accordingly, the "gestion des terroirs" programme is far from countrywide. Its approach is used by many projects in the different regions, but however numerous, they cover no more than a minor part of the country. Thus, newly created village councils in charge of natural resource management are found in no more than a few hundred villages.

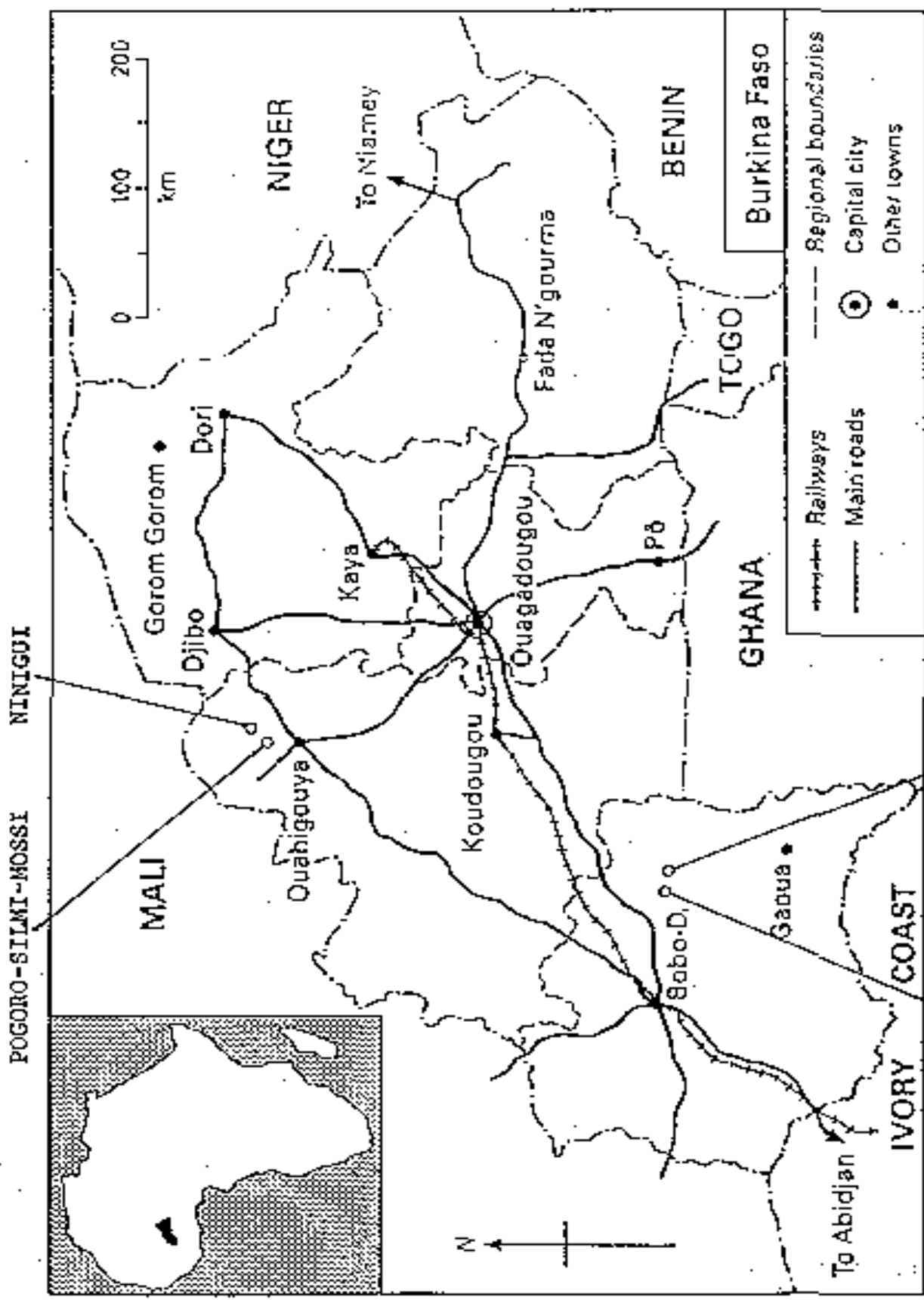
Projects employ different approaches according to the likes and dislikes of donors. Some emphasize the creation of the village councils, others find them superfluous. Consequently, the resource management programme is implemented differently in various locations. This is not only due to the environmental or socio-economic conditions, but is linked to donor preferences. The state is not in a position to influence the implementation to any large extent.

The four villages

One of the criteria for the selection of the four villages was the performance of the councils in charge of natural resource management. Villages where some resource management activities were undertaken were preferred, so that local decision-making processes and the introduction of new organizational structures could be analyzed. Relatively successful village councils were therefore chosen in order to understand the specific dynamics of local politics and organizational change. Since it was felt that resource management takes place differently under different agro-climatic conditions, villages in various geographical zones were chosen. This has a significant influence on socio-economic conditions.

Field work was based on open-ended, loosely structured interviews. Initially the history of the villages, village organizations, the division of labour within households, the organization of the production, and *the use of natural resources were discussed*. Latterly, the focus was on the village councils, their organization and activities, the relationship between councils and villagers, etc.. Finally, recent conflicts were traced in order to see how local politics and natural resource management work when the norms and rules for decision-making and collective action are potentially threatened and changed by social actors inside or outside the villages. In such situations it should be possible to get an idea of the essential dynamics and factors influencing local politics. The range of interviewees included chiefs, leaders, council members, groups of women, immigrants, pastoralists and men far from decision-making centres as well as prefects and project workers.

The specific location of the four villages is seen from the map. Ninigui and Pogoro-Silmi-Mossi are located in the Yatenga province in the northwest while Tankiédougou and Nahirindon belong to the Bougouriba province in the southwest. All the four villages are affected by projects working in the field of natural resource management. The *Projet Vivrier Nord Yatenga* has been operating in Ninigui and Pogoro since 1990. In Nahirindon and Tankiédougou the



Based on the map p. 6 in Sharp, Robin: *Burkina Faso, New Life to Sahel*, Oxford, 1990

Projet Développement Rural Intégré de la Bougouriba has been working since 1986 and is now moving out of the area. The projects are financed by two different donors.

Yatenga is ethnically homogeneous, with the exception of a few Fulani. Close links between the Mossi villages exist and there is a strong hierarchical structure, dating from the Mossi kingdom of the mid sixteenth century (Izard 1985), within both the region and the household. Although households are relatively independent, interhousehold relations can be complex. Elaborate traditions for collective working groups and systems of mutual exchange exist (see Ouédraogo 1990). It is felt that the area of productive land and forest is declining and the average rainfall has been declining over the last 40 years (Dugué 1990).

Ninigui, a large and old village, is tormented by persistent conflicts over the roles of village chief and land chief. As in most Burkinabé villages, the political influence of a lineage depends on the length of residence in the village. Accordingly, the history of the village is strongly disputed by the different lineages. People are to a large extent organised in fairly efficient working groups. Agriculture is the main activity with livestock herding being of marginal importance.

Being a relatively recently founded village, Pogoro-Silmi-Mossi consists of approximately twelve lineages of very different sizes. The village chief has been accused of monopolising the infrastructure provided by the project. A number of working groups exist but most of them do not function. Although the subsistence of the villagers is based on agriculture, some regard themselves principally as livestock herders.

The study area in Bougouriba is characterised by immigration, of the Pougoulis from Ghana at the turn of the century and more recently of the Dagaris and others. The areas has been isolated for many years, and the social hierarchy is far from the elaborate kind found in Yatenga. The Pougoulis have closer interhousehold ties than the Dagaris, although both have some arrangements for mutual assistance

in the fields. Pressure on the available land has increased substantially but soil erosion and deforestation are not felt to be very important problems by the villagers. The social conditions have been changed dramatically by the project which has established additional villages and built schools, health clinics, roads, etc.

In Tankié Dougou, there is tension between the Pougoulis, who completely control land and collective decisions, although being a small minority, and four newly arrived ethnic groups. The chief, being a most respected but ageing person, by his very presence prevents the tension from breaking out into open conflict. Working groups have existed but have collapsed, apart from one that has been created along religious lines. Agriculture is the dominant activity, with the exception of the cattle bred by some Fulanis.

Despite a very high rate of immigration increasing the population five times during twelve years, conflicts are few in Nahirindon. As in Tankié Dougou, the Pougoulis constitute one fifth of the population and control village affairs. The chiefs are politically influential but the main forum for decision-making is the men's working group. There is little livestock herding. Instead, cotton is a financially significant crop.

Major features characterizing the four villages

	Yatenga Province		Boulgouriba Province	
	Ninigui	Pogoro-Silni-Massi	Tankiédoou	Nahindan
Inhabitants	3800	400	400	1000
Number of ethnic groups	1	1	5	2
Approximate yearly rainfall	530 mm		1000 mm	
Years since foundation	> 200	100	100	100
Number of organized working groups	8	5	2	1
Production of commercial crops	No	No	A bit	A lot
Population movements	Little seasonal migration		Extreme migration	
Social relations between the village and external authorities	Stable		Few	
The degree of overt conflicts	Large	Large	Medium	Small
Existence of a village council	Yes	Yes	No	Yes and No
Zoning of village lands	No	No	Yes	Yes

This is a very sketchy introduction which does not do justice to the complexity and richness of social life in the villages. The purpose has been to create a setting for the discussion of village politics.

A need for new organizations?

The point of departure of the "gestion des terroirs" programme is the alarming degradation of natural resources in Burkina Faso. Although questioned by some, the assumption is made that agricultural potential is deteriorating due to changes in the natural resource base. The management of these resources had become a key question, with the implication that management has been either poor or non-existent until recently (GOBF 1989). However, if natural resource management is considered in terms of local level conflict resolution and the making of decisions over the use of scarce resources, then institutions for resource management do exist, although the appropriateness of their decisions may be questioned.

An understanding of this process is needed if intervention into natural resource management is to occur. While there are no elaborate structures dealing exclusively with resource management in the four villages, general institutions for decision-making and conflict resolution do exist. The male head of the household dominates household decisions, including how, when and what to grow in the collective fields. Collective fields form the main part of a household's land, and take precedence over individual plots.¹

The influence of the chiefs is declining, partly due to State policy post-independence (Savonnet-Guyot 1986). The chief no longer has parties organised in his honour, nor is he the only village member able to deal with people outside the village. However, in terms of conflict resolution, or land distribution, he is difficult to bypass. Interhousehold conflict and disputes with neighbouring villages or pastoralists also involve the chief. Newcomers to the village and villagers who wish to clear more land must work through the chief.²

Working groups exist in all four villages, partly because of recent national policy encouraging the creation of "groupements villageois". For example, the only way to get hold of credit from the Caisse Nationale de Crédit Agricole is through a formally established village group. Furthermore, arrangements for the exchange of labour power between households both in the northern and in the southern villages are common. Institutions for collective action are numerous.

¹ There are, of course, differences to this general description of decision-making within households outlined here especially between ethnic groups, but the pattern that decision-making is strongly centralized in the hands of a male head, is clear across ethnic differences.

² Again, there are differences between the four villages. Especially in Ninigui, the positions of village chief and land chief have been very influential, and the struggles when new chiefs had to be nominated have been fierce and devastating for village solidarity. In Nahirindon, on the other hand, the present chief is very weak, and he is increasingly being marginalized in village affairs.

Both formal organizations and working groups are influenced by external decisions and policy incentives, such as money and food. Members must pay a fee, and membership is optional, although in Nahirindon social pressure is put on immigrants to adhere. The groups are not democratic organisations. Decisions are normally made by the president or a small group of influential people, although there are limits to what the president can decide to do if he wants the members to carry out the work.

The organizations and working groups function quite differently. Some of the groups work reasonably well. They meet often, and a large number of the members participate in the activities. Other groups exist more in name than in fact. Yet, in all the four villages it is possible for the leaders to gather many people for collective activities benefitting the whole village. Thus, if natural resource management requires labour power, it is possible to get it as long as people see benefits from it for themselves.

The two most important institutions for decision-making and implementation at the village level - the chieftainship and the working groups - are not democratic. There are no traditions for open discussion of village affairs, for criticism of decisions made by leaders, for public elections of leaders, etc. Not only do leaders try to monopolize the right to take decisions, but others do not consider themselves in a position to make proposals regarding village affairs. They do not even seem to have opinions on these matters because, as some argued in Nahirindon, it would be offensive towards village leaders if they had.

The decision-making structure in the villages effectively silences non-leaders, making it unimaginable and almost impossible for them to form their own opinion regarding community affairs.³

This is the situation in which the "gestion des terroirs" programme seeks to implant new, and representative, local organizations for resource management. In Bougouriba the zoning of village lands has been emphasized while less effort has gone into the creation of village councils. In Yatenga, village councils have been established whereas the zoning of the land has not yet begun. There are sound local level socio-economic and geographical reasons for this difference in approach.

In the two Bougouriba villages the project initiated the division of land into zones for agriculture, grazing, wood collection, fallow, *etc.* There is increasing support from villagers, who argue that the zoning helps to avoid grazing animals in the fields. The original inhabitants, concerned about land scarcity, see the zoning as an opportunity to control the number of plots and to halt further immigration. The earlier land distribution system, whereby the chief automatically granted newcomers land if they accepted to obey the customs and rules in the village, has broken down due to the recent increase in the volume of immigration.

Zoning was therefore welcomed by the Pougoulis in Tankiédougou and Nahirindon. The project offered at the right moment an arrangement that suited the interests of the most powerful group in the villages. A halt to immigration has occurred, although when pressed hard many immigrants believe that there is sufficient space for more

³ This feature is more accentuated in the villages in Bougouriba than in the Yatenga villages. The high proportion of the population constituted by immigrants in the Bougouriba villages accounts to a certain extent for this. Yet, even in the villages in Yatenga the ordinary villagers tend to regard village politics as leaders' affairs.

people.⁴ Thus, the reason why zoning works is tied to the struggle for power. The original ethnic group feels their monopoly on decision-making at the village level threatened by the increasingly large number of immigrants.

If a new institution fulfils the needs of powerful people, the conclusion to be drawn is that it can successfully be introduced from outside. The objectives lying behind the outside organization proposing this new institution may not be the same as the motives stimulating local people and groups to accept it. In the present case, concern over maintaining agricultural potential is shared by the project and most villagers but controlling immigration has been an additional motive to influence certain villagers. Thus to understand the consequences of the "Gestion des Terroirs" programme one should not regard villages as homogeneous groups of men and women, but as an arena where different groups struggle to further their own interests.

Councils, introduced by the project, were established in Tankiédougou and Nahirindon originally in 1989 and were later reorganised due to a national decree stating that presidents of formally acknowledged village groups cannot also be members of village councils. Reorganised or not, the councils have never worked as intended. Very few meetings have been held, and council members are often not aware of their role nor even of being a member, in some cases.

In Tankiédougou decisions remain in the hands of the old and respected chief and his son, who discuss all village affairs with a small group of relatives prior to meetings. A council including representatives of the newly arrived migrants would threaten this

⁴ The reason why at least some immigrants have to be pressed hard on this question is that they bring themselves in opposition to the Pougoulis and thereby the leaders when they argue that the settlement of additional immigrants would not cause any problems.

decision-making process. Another important reason explaining why these councils have never exercised power had been the lack of need for such an organisation as the existing system deals efficiently with all natural resource management decisions and conflicts. Collective activities are organized, new fields are granted to villagers who need them, and a conflict between a cattle herder and some farmers during my fieldwork was solved effectively by customary methods.

In Nahirindon, the decision-making process has been rather fluid lately. The former village chief died and his weak brother had to be promoted. The president of the men's working group was, moreover, replaced due to irregularities. This has led to a revival of the council. The president of the council who is the only possible leader at the moment, being a Pougouli and a capable man, has gathered a group of people with whom he discusses village affairs, not only natural resource management. This group overlaps to some extent with the formal members of the council, but includes all of the important people in the village. This modified council has proved functional due to the instability of the general decision-making structures in the village rather than to a need for a better natural resource management.

It is not possible in Bougouriba to attract funds and support for the development of the villages through the councils. The project is withdrawing from the area, and there are no other possible donors. Thus, there are no outside incentives or pressures to make the councils work. When the project intervened in the area, it did not do much to support the councils, to educate council members and the like, or clarify how a council actually functions.

It is difficult to see the necessity of introducing representative village councils to take care of natural resource management. The villagers feel no need for such a structure, and decision-making institutions

exist, albeit of an uncertain character in Nahirindon, in both villages.⁵ Furthermore, the representative nature of the councils has not been well received. Though the project has not insisted on any strict form of representation, the idea that, for example, women should participate in council meetings is awkward, and perceived as ridiculous. Decisions on village affairs are taken in a centralized manner, and the legitimacy of a decision has to do with the sex, age, and family background of the person who has taken it. Position as a member of a council is less important. While a village council might be legitimate in the eyes of the state and the donors from the fact that it is representative, villagers are more concerned about the legitimacy of individuals. External and internal legitimacy of a local organization are based on different features, and likely to differ.

Politically, a representative organization presents an opportunity for hitherto marginalized, weaker groups to participate in and influence village affairs. If those in power feel threatened by rapid social change, receiving the idea of a village council with uneasiness and even hostility, few of them will be prepared to work for the consolidation and development of this structure.

The project in Yatenga has been underway since the early 1990s, and has started by focusing on institutions rather than zoning. In Ninigui, the council is composed of six people, with eight subcommittees each of three members. The council meets fairly often. It has initiated different activities, and it is relatively well known by the villagers. But it refrains from mediating in conflicts over natural resources. The village chief continues to be the authority in such matters. Instead, the

⁵ Actually, the fluidity of political life in Nahirindon might very well be advantageous seen from a resource management point of view. When fewer decision-making institutions restrain the social actors, new and possibly more effective ways of handling resource management problems might emerge. In Tankiédougou, the old chief seems to have difficulties in adapting to a situation with strong immigration. Accordingly, the attitude towards management of natural resources among the Pougoulis in Tankiédougou has, so far, been rather reactive.

council coordinates the construction of stone lines in the fields, and it has organized the building of a maternity ward. In this sense, the council does not differ from the many working groups already existing in the village.

The council is an organizational novelty in the sense that it is supposed to cover the whole village. Ninigui has been divided into two groups who have fought each other for many years. Now each are represented by fifteen persons in the council. The chief is no longer the sole legitimate authority regarding community affairs. The members of the council have been chosen primarily for reasons rooted in the all-dominating conflict in the village, yet different social groups are to some extent represented, such as by the eight women members.

The creation of the council in Ninigui has been successful in the sense that it is now possible to make decisions that concern the whole village, and develop infrastructure that does not have to be duplicated to ensure that all villagers benefit from it. This new situation is evidently a result of the fact that many people had become tired of the persistent quarrels in the village. In addition the creation of a council provided a structure for reconciliation. Yet the council does not conform to the expectations of a body primarily managing natural resources. It does not resolve disputes over natural resource use, and it is mainly concerned with social and economic infrastructure. The project has wisely accepted to support these other activities.⁶

⁶ It is most reasonable and the only way forward to engage in the social development of the village as a whole, instead of restricting one's activities to natural resource management. Villagers who are desperately in need of health clinics, education, water facilities, etc., are reluctant to make substantial efforts to preserve the environment largely without individual benefits. There is an obvious incongruity between the issues emphasized by the villagers and the focus upon natural resources in the "gestion des terroirs" programme.

The council in Pogoro comprises three members - the president, the treasurer and the secretary - plus seven subcommissions, each holding three members and dealing with agriculture, water, health, female activities, etc. Meetings are held when project activities require them. The subcommissions work unevenly. The one on water is quite active as the project has supported the digging of a couple of wells. Members of other subcommissions are passive. Members feel responsible for action if something prompts them but are not proactive in seeking activities. Non-leaders feel awkward about initiating activities. The procedure of preparing, discussing and implementing ideas, plans and activities is alien to most members. The president also has a very vague comprehension of his tasks and duties as president. Subcommissions are often overruled or neglected by the leaders, creating problems where council members are uncertain of their duties, and feel bound by their leaders decisions.

The representative nature of councils and also their daily work are new concepts. The processes of decision-making are different from the way decisions have been taken hitherto. Now, "ordinary" members of the councils in Pogoro and Ninigui are given a role to play. This is a new and difficult situation both for themselves and for existing leaders. The delegation of authority to non-leaders is strange to most people, as is the idea of public discussions of village affairs.

One intention of the councils is that decisions should no longer be made by one person (the chief), but by a collectivity, thus airing conflicting points of view. The chief made decisions after having heard the opinions of his group of elders and, if it concerned a conflict, the parties involved. Now, the conflicting parties are supposed to reach an agreement without referring to a higher authority. The legitimacy of the chief was based on his standing, and knowledge of village lands and people. The legitimacy of the councils is, from the standpoint of the "gestion des terroirs" programme, based primarily on their effectiveness and secondly on their democratic

structure. These are, however, not values on which legitimate authority has been established in Burkinabé villages in the past. On the contrary, the formal organization of the councils does not mean much to most villagers. In reality, only the president, treasurer and secretary are likely to play important roles and the ability to change these members is not determined by formal procedures. A president, who will usually be a leader already, is to a great extent considered above reproach and very difficult to remove.

Representative councils based on free discussions among equal participants face strong alternative institutions. They do however provide an opportunity for some people and groups (e.g. women) who during the last twenty years have become less marginalized, to advance their position. Yet, it is very doubtful that these structures with their numerous subcommittees will ever work as intended if they are not strongly supported by an outside project.

The village chief in Pogoro argued that his primary task as president of the council is to facilitate the relationship between the project and the village; the council has nothing to do with the government of the village and little to do with natural resource management. It is an instrument to obtain funds, created to please outside donors. Each donor, whether governmental or non-governmental, tends to demand its own exclusive organizational structure. The council becomes a tool to be used in negotiations with external authorities rather than a forum for internal discussions of village affairs.

In Ninigui, the project demanded that the two conflicting parties start to collaborate before supporting activities in the village. As the tension between these groups was strong, the villagers would probably not have succeeded in getting together without the prospects of getting outside funds - the minutes of the first meeting is nothing but a shopping list of projects to be funded. The creation of the council did not reflect a strongly felt need for such an institution, yet it continues

to exist, representing a unique possibility for managing village affairs in a manner acceptable to all factions. Moreover, the chief's adversaries see an opportunity to weaken the chieftainship by reinforcing the authority of the council. The council then becomes a pawn in the political game in the village.

To conclude, traditional institutions such as chieftainships and working groups for decision making continue to exist. They are used for resource management and conflict resolution. New organisations are not the solution needed. Support to existing, admittedly imperfect, organisations could provide more immediate and lasting results.

Before introducing new organisations, there must be a clear need for them, and a lack of legitimate existing structures. The delegation of decision-making power, away from traditional leaders, is a considerable change from present practice and should not be expected to take place without significant and continued support. The political forces in the village must not be utterly opposed to the new organization, or feel too threatened by it.

Social groups, power and local politics

The "gestion des terroirs" programme encourages broad representation on the councils to take account of the fact that various social groups utilize natural resources in different ways. Livestock keepers and farmers have separate interests in natural resource management. Therefore, they should meet in a council, work out their differences, and agree to certain rules for governing the use of natural resources. While this sounds reasonable at the theoretical level, in practice it is rather more complicated.

The "gestion des terroirs" programme emphasizes the diverse needs of different user groups. However, within and across these groups

there are also significant differences. Dependence on the resources, political influence and importance of the actors vary considerably, creating a broad spectrum of interests.

Immigrants are marginalized in terms of political influence, yet depend strongly upon the land because they have few relatives to assist them. They have had little influence on the zoning policies despite the fact that they are affected by them. Immigrants' tenure rights are usually insecure since the original "landowner" might reclaim the land. Consequently, immigrants have an incentive to drain the land at their disposition in order to get maximum output in the short run. Migrants might also regard their stay in a certain village as a temporary phenomenon and, accordingly, the future use of the resources becomes less a concern of theirs.

Due to differences in wealth and access to the decision making process, leaders and non-leaders may approach natural resource management differently. The relationship between decision-makers and "ordinary" villagers is weak. Many leaders regard it as a one way flow of information about the decisions they have made. Non-leaders have very few possibilities for influencing them and feel little responsibility.

This lack of power is aggravated by the way information is spread within the villages. Whenever there is a meeting or a collective task, a person notifies each household or quarter. However, only the representatives attend meetings, and little information is disseminated, especially to the women. Many villagers are unaware of discussions in the councils, and many leaders are not well informed about the wishes and desires of their fellow villagers. Therefore two distinct groups tend to develop; a small minority of leaders and important people involved in decision-making and the development of the village, and a large majority of "ordinary" villagers who try to mind their own business.

One conclusion is that social groups cannot be identified exclusively on the basis of their use of resources. E.g. farmers are not a homogeneous group with similar interests. Another, is that social groups are not equally influential when decisions are made. However, an idea underlying the "gestion des terroirs" programme is that having a representative in the council will safeguard the interests of a social groups. This is far from evident, and groups can be marginalised even when present.

The environmental concern

The difference between the northern Yatenga province and the southern Bougouriba province is striking when it comes to the state of natural resources and their agricultural potential. Average yearly rainfall in Bougouriba is almost twice that of Yatenga, and the soil is generally much richer. Even in Yatenga, however, despite the pressures upon them, farmers are not necessarily enthusiastic about natural resource management.

Village councils seem to be more concerned about the creation of infrastructure. Ninigui council presented seven proposals for the development of the village at a meeting with a number of donor agencies. Of these proposals one concerned anti-erosion activities, two were related to agricultural tools, and four had to do with health, water supply and education. This is the same pattern as found elsewhere: 10 villages submitted 64 proposals at the meeting, 15 pertained to natural resource management, 19 to agricultural activities and 30 to the development of infrastructure (health, education, water supply, cereal banks, etc.).

The demand for natural resource management does not seem to arise from within the villages. Yet while leaders, and the council, do not emphasize resource management activities, some non-leaders put a lot

of effort into this work. There is also a tendency to blame the erratic and insufficient rains for all calamities. As rainfall is beyond direct human influence, people tend to accept the processes of degradation as fate and inevitable. Once it is seen that management techniques have an effect, more individuals might be encouraged to join in. There is also an important distinction between rich and poor, in opportunities for alternative income, since the poor have to rely more heavily on agriculture (see Reardon et al. 1993). As a result the latter have a much stronger incentive to maintain and improve their farm plots.

Environmental management is often characterized by a kind of collective action problem, to sustain efforts when the work does not engender individual benefits.⁷ For some activities, such as tree-planting, the long time frame and lack of immediate obvious returns to the individual, involves substantial effort with unclear benefits. Similarly, the collective building of stone lines requires continued motivation after a farmer's own fields have been done.

The "gestion des terroirs" programme tends to regard the question of environmental concern as an educational problem. Villagers should be made to realize that natural resources are becoming degraded and that they have to stem this trend. This is a dubious road to follow. Villagers are aware of the environmental problems facing them, but it is futile to try to promote management if there is nothing in it for individuals or if they pursue other livelihood strategies.

⁷ By individual benefits I do not necessarily think of private goods. Individuals can profit from public goods, and in none of the four villages it seems to be a problem to mobilize people to participate in public works if they provide broad public benefits.

Democratizing village life

The introduction of representative village councils from outside is a delicate matter, and does not necessarily assist natural resource management. Councils may work against some of the decision-making institutions existing in the villages. There are also circumstances where there is a need for such organizations, where social actors are ready to support them, and where a co-existence with local decision-making institutions is possible. The decision to create a village council should depend on a thorough analysis of the specific conditions in the village concerned.

Other reasons than those pertaining to natural resource management can account for the attempt to create local organisations of a representative kind. The state in Burkina Faso has always sought to organize the peasants, and democracy is very much in vogue among donors. Accordingly, it might be argued that environmental projects should contribute to the mobilisation and democratisation of the villages.

The two objectives are, however, very different. The democratic concern touches upon the very nature of social organization, people's beliefs and political struggle. Trying to influence these is a slow process, and the time frame of projects is seldom sufficient to undertake such a task. Attempts to democratize village life might give rise to a temporary reduction in decision-making capabilities due to the creation of new political institutions in the villages. This will not improve the management of natural resources.

Attempts to democratise village life from outside contradict arguments in favour of bottom-up development. The participatory point of view is that people have to develop their own ideas and that outside intervention is inherently bad because it is alien. The alternative opinion is that people are conservative and traditional and that new

thoughts have to come from outside. Both these views are inadequate as they tend to separate too rigidly the local from the national, the traditional from the modern, and the peasant from the bureaucrat. The villages are far from isolated entities. Seasonal and long-term migration, commercial production, and activities by NGOs, projects and the state have for a long time influenced village matters and made the outside world an important component of daily life.

To discard intervention from outside is unrealistic. Instead, it is necessary to question the type and appropriateness of interventions. The "gestion des terroirs" approach tries to substitute village councils for local institutions, which are often legitimate and backed by powerful interest groups. In Tankiédougou the authority of the chief is not questioned, and the newly created council has little support. In contrast, the council in Ninigui has gained legitimacy because it does not attack existing institutions, and includes the whole village. The subcommissions, attempting further decentralisation, are contested by some, and are dependent on project backing.

Present evidence indicates that modest changes to existing decision-making institutions are more promising than wholesale substitution. Were living conditions to undergo fundamental changes, a thorough transformation of institutions might be appropriate. However, while the four villages are characterized by rapid social change, living conditions have not altered significantly, and are sufficiently stable to make it difficult to introduce institutional change from outside.

The comparison between Tankiédougou and Ninigui demonstrates the importance of social actors prepared to work in favour of new institutions. Numerous NGOs have been working in Ninigui for the last twenty five years, so more people especially women have actively participated in collective affairs.

Democratization should also take care not to create unrest in the villages. The chieftainships have avoided intra-village conflicts and act as a means to resolve controversy over land, marriage obligations, etc. To replace chieftainship with democratic institutions might release, rather than restrain, conflicts. When there is no higher authority to turn to, an additional strain is put upon the conflicting parties. Existing institutions should be taken seriously and the democratization efforts adapted accordingly.

The experience from the four villages shows that efforts to democratize Burkinabé village life could, at least initially, concentrate on strengthening marginalized groups rather than creating democratic organizations. Marginalized groups, such as women and poorer men, who are often not prepared to participate in democratic arrangements, need to be supported on their own terms for years before they are ready to confront the leaders. This is most obvious in the Bougouriba villages where democratic institutions are unimaginable at present. Even in Yatenga, where people have become familiar with the working groups, it might be too early to introduce egalitarian organizations.

Conclusion

The "gestion des terroirs" programme seeks to put local natural resource users in a central position for managing their resources. This is done on the basis of poor experience with state-led management. There is little doubt that this effort to decentralize has had a positive impact on natural resource management in the areas where the programme has been implemented. Resource users appear better informed about local conditions, and concerned about resource management if it ensures them benefits within a foreseeable future.

The programme has, however, emphasized the creation of representative village councils. This may not be a step forward from a resource managing point of view. Some decision-making village institutions exist already, but the basis for democratic organizations is not present. Village councils are not necessarily supported by local social actors, they lack legitimacy, villagers do not regard them as indispensable, and their mode of functioning contradicts existing decision-making institutions. In the short run, it seems the only reason why villagers accept these councils are because they do not want to be impolite and they provide a means to get funds for the development of the village.

An important question arises from the discussion: why does the "gestion des terroirs" programme try to integrate two concerns that are by no means obviously compatible. Natural resource management and democratic decision-making institutions might go hand in hand under certain conditions, but it is clear from the four villages analyzed here that this is not always the case. Democratizing village life is a slow task involving substantial change within institutions and challenge to powerful groups. Natural resource management could be reinforced and developed more quickly without such fundamental changes in institutions. To stress excessively democratic ambitions might endanger the resource management objectives by confronting too squarely village institutions and power structures.

Observations on the document entitled *Creating local democratic politics from above: the "gestion des terroirs" approach in Burkina Faso*

by Moussa Ouédraogo, PNGT, Burkina Faso

First, I must point out that my observations are of a very general nature.

Going through the document, one may agree with the author that application of the GT approach in the field at present poses a few problems and he would have made himself better understood if he had put some of his remarks back into their context.

All the organisational problems mentioned in the document are usually connected with historical facts which are ignored: amongst other things, the promulgation of laws dealing with agrarian and property reorganisation (Réorganisation Agraire et Foncière) under the revolution from August 1983 to October 1987, which profoundly marked community life and traditional organisation in the villages. Designed during the same period, the "gestion des terroirs" approach had been seen as a way of implementing agrarian and property reform in the field.

These two facts ought to have been pointed out and analyzed to see what impact they had on the application of GT in the field.

When one goes through the document, one has the impression that this is still the understanding and that there has been no qualitative development. In fact, the Réorganisation Agraire et Foncière has been revised four times to take account of local decision-making institutions. At the same time, PRA/MARP has been widely adopted as a tool for implementing the approach in the field.

The history of the two "gestion des terroirs" projects which were the subject of the case studies should be mentioned to facilitate understanding of the analysis.

For instance, the two villages in Bougouriba are located in an area which was the subject of an earlier development operation by the Volta Valleys Development Authority (AVV). The point here is that the State, while eradicating the vector of onchocerciasis (river blindness) which was the scourge of the area, took over the land for development schemes and in order to ease congestion on the central plateau which was deemed overpopulated. Villages were thus created from scratch to receive settlers (Mossi migrants and others). The local people, who were annoyed by this expropriation for the benefit of other people from outside, always refused to accept peaceful coexistence between the two groups.

The social crises and difficulties in democratic organisation which are present today are not a result of the PNGT, but of the reaction of the indigenous people to an earlier development approach. This problem is very well known and arises in all areas where the AVV used to work (Ganzourgou, Zoundwèogo, Bougouriba, Bitou, etc.).

It could be said that it was through the GT approach that the local people were able to air the problem, because the tools and communication methods used made it easier for them to express themselves.

In the same way, the behaviour of the people is justified, as the same structures which created the problem are responsible for implementing GT in that area. The village councils encountered during the study are nothing more than the former management groups of the development schemes, broadened to include indigenous people. They are not therefore necessarily the result of GT.

Is "gestion des terroirs" just equal to natural resource management? Some historical background to the experimental phase of implementing GT in the field would have made it possible to understand certain remarks.

In fact, if natural resource management did seem to be a priority in a good number of projects in the field, that can be justified in the sense that many existing classic soil and water conservation projects were asked to test the complex GT approach. Not having been prepared either methodologically or financially to cope with the requirements of such an approach, some projects did no more than continue their former activities while considering themselves to be "gestion des terroirs" projects.

It is not correct to say that the PNGT considers the establishment of new village councils as a precondition for natural resource management. While it is true that some projects, in their haste, have made this an end in itself, resulting in bitter defeat, there are some contrary examples. This applies to the provinces where the PNGT's activities have been funded by the World Bank since 1991 and where so far no "gestion des terroirs" commissions have been set up.

The teams working in the field have been using PRA as their main diagnostic tool and all the activities currently being implemented were not preconceived, but arose from the application of the method.

Regarding the contribution of the GT approach to the democratisation process, it should be noted here that much has been done by the PNGT to facilitate the establishment of the democratisation process, by passing on the information and other data needed to understand the real situation of the local people.

At national level, this led to the fourth revision of the laws dealing with agrarian and property reorganisation with a view to adapting

them as far as possible to field realities; in the same way, the national decentralisation commission, under pressure from GT projects, had undertaken several studies and consultations which should make it possible to proceed with an effective transfer of responsibility to grassroots communities.

Democracy and the PNGT: The author's presentation of the democratic process in the villages does not seem to be very convincing. By definition, democracy is well and truly the power of the majority, just as it is the result of a sound form of political organisation which represents the interests of broad social groups in accordance with a view of society to which they freely subscribe.

This means that as part of the democratisation process in the Sahelian environment, it is increasingly necessary to take account of certain realities such as the influence of modern life on traditional management of village affairs, as well as the "demographic pressure" on the value of certain customs.

These days, traditional decision-making practices are still applied in villages such as Nahirindon. Yet can one speak of democratisation in this area while ignoring the majority, even if it is made up of migrants? In view of the complexity of the topic, the PNGT may have chosen the wrong way of contributing towards its establishment, in attempting to influence political decisions by bringing up to the attention of the proper authorities some of the difficulties faced in applying current legislation.

However, it is very important to distinguish between the law (represented by the constitution and other texts such as the RAF and so on) which immediately plans its own implementation structures and the PNGT, which is one of the policies adopted by the government and its partners to support local people in taking charge of their own affairs. In the analysis of the democratisation process and the PNGT,

this clarification in particular is missing and would have avoided any ambiguity in the remarks.

The PNGT and its "gestion des terroirs" approach are not yet perfect, as the objectives assigned cannot be achieved without adequate, clear and operational legislation; a genuine and steady transfer of the powers communities need to assert themselves; and the conception and mastery by all players of communication, analysis and responsible decision-making tools. Some of these tasks are a matter for policy-makers, while others are within the scope of technicians. One of the challenges for the PNGT is to improve co-ordination of the whole process and ensure that village people get something out of it.

Reply from Lars Engberg-Pedersen

A discussion of initiatives to achieve a competent management of natural resources in Burkina Faso has to distinguish between at least three different levels. First, laws and regulations (such as RAF) provide a necessary and unavoidable frame. Secondly, policies and programmes (such as PNGT) establish national priorities and approaches. Thirdly, projects and local state authorities carry out concrete efforts.

Mr Ouédraogo lucidly points out the difference between the two first levels and clarifies the development of both RAF and PNGT during the last decade. It is beyond doubt that substantial changes have taken place making national legislation and policies more flexible and responsive to local conditions. There have even been discussions questioning the appropriateness of representative village councils, the focus on natural resources and the zoning of village lands.

In my paper, I discuss the concrete efforts made at the local level. These efforts do not reflect national priorities unambiguously,

especially as local initiatives very often are carried out by foreign donors with their own priorities. Accordingly, the points of criticism raised are directed towards, first the *implementation* of the "gestion des terroirs" approach in two different provinces and, second, some widespread understandings of democratization and natural resource management.

No matter the very constructive development of PNGT, two prevalent opinions are that country dwellers in Sahel need natural resource management above all else, and that councils dealing with conflicts and village wide activities should be representative or even democratic. The present study seeks to question these opinions and to demonstrate the contradiction between villagers' aspirations and decision-making institutions, efforts to institute local natural resource management, and attempts to democratize village politics. Currently, these three considerations are not easily combined.

The suggestions raised in the paper are partly in line with discussions of natural resource management in Burkina Faso. I subscribe fully to the idea sometimes voiced that the "gestion des terroirs" approach should be global in the sense that environmental, economic, social, political, etc. aspects should be combined. In addition, I propose that democratic ambitions should be pursued through support to marginalised groups. This is a necessary condition for the introduction of representative decision-making structures in the long run.

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