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Participatory shaping of institutional landscapes

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• Institutions

Development projects cannot be sustainable without functioning institutions. Moreover both effective self-help and the empowerment of local people need a strong institutional base. Thus, appropriate institutions underpin the challenges of development. But what kind of institutions¹ are needed? Governmental or non-governmental ones? For-profit or non-profit organisations? Local, regional or national ones? Or do we have to think of an appropriate mix which considers institutional landscapes in their totality? Subsidiarity helps to answer these questions.

Subsidiarity: organisational principles for making decisions at the lowest possible administrative level (decentralisation) and organising the state away from public ownership.

This article shows how local people can analyse and evaluate their relationship with a range of institutions that impact upon their village. This process can be used to enable the village to better organise itself to direct its own development.

• The promotion of subsidiarity

We were mandated by the German Development Service (DED) to find practical ways to promote subsidiarity. We started our co-operation with *Molibemo*, a peasants' federation which encompasses 75 villages on

¹ In a strict sense, institutions and organisation are different. The former represent the 'rules of the game' while the latter are the actors. However, as in common practice, the terms are used interchangeably in this article.

the Dogon-plateau in Mali, in September 1994.

Subsidiarity will be most effective in a political administrative setting which encourages private initiatives (whether they are profit-oriented or not) and favours local government. Mali, being formally democratic since 1991, is undertaking a profound restructuring of its administrative system.

Autonomous governments are to be introduced at all administrative levels. They will be endowed with a mission and resources and legitimised by the people through the election of councils. Currently, however, the rural areas are administered by public officers who are nominated by the state and are strictly dependent on central government.

• Co-operation with Molibemo

Our co-operation with Molibemo aimed to:

- provide villagers with information about the current decentralisation process and initiate a process of discussion;
- encourage villagers to articulate and analyse their problems with the current administrators of their affairs (e.g. the centralised local administration, donor projects, the activities of NGOs, village-co-operatives and village-based self-help-groups or small enterprises);
- stimulate the villagers to find solutions to their institutional problems by comparing the efficacy of the various organisational forms and discussing the comparative advantages of local self-government (be it in the form of a self-help-group, an enterprise, a village, a village-co-operative or the *commune* of the future); and,

- accompany the villages on their way to realise their solutions.

• Promoting participatory institutional landscapes

We used a combination of Action-Research (AR) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). AR can be characterised as:

- cyclical: AR consists of a permanent cycle of 'research-decision-action-evaluation-research-etc.';
- participatory: the core of AR is its feedback-system, a common learning-process based on local knowledge is possible;
- change-oriented: AR does not stop with data-collection; it aims at identifying problems (research) and at solving them (action);
- efficient: data are only collected to facilitate a process of change. This minimises data-imperialism where researchers from the North exploit the database of the South; and,
- multidisciplinary: qualitative and quantitative methods are to be employed according to their usefulness and applicability.

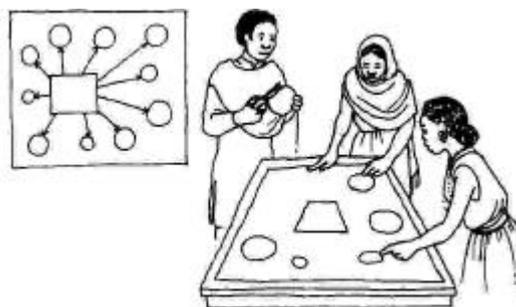
We found the tools and ethics of PRA highly compatible with AR. Thus we applied a combination of AR and PRA which we describe as *change-oriented PRA*.

We used standard visualisation tools (e.g. Venn diagrams, Box 1) and developed them to suit our purposes (e.g. Interaction diagram, see below). Diagrams were useful because the drawings attracted attention in an area where papers and pencils are rare. They offered a visual structure to discussions and enabled us to describe communities and compare findings between villages.

Diagrams enable the analysis to be undertaken within the community. This offers local peoples the chance to take it forward and develop workable solutions to local problems. Furthermore, the analysis empowered local people as they realised it is not necessary to have a formal education to analyse complex topics.

BOX 1 VENN DIAGRAMS

Venn diagrams use visual symbols to enable individuals to understand institutional linkages and relationships. Paper circles of different sizes are used to represent different institutions and these are mapped according to the interactions between them.



• In the villages

Table 1 describes the approach used in each of 44 villages. We started with an Information Campaign to establish contact and initiate discussion. This provided details of the on-going decentralisation process in Mali and the objectives of our project (Step 0).

Three weeks later, a team of two facilitators arrived in each village and stayed for a period of ten days. The schedule for this varied from place to place but usually contained:

- meeting to present the project and gain permission to work from the Village Chief;
- meeting with the Village-Assembly to present the project and plan the interviews according to the availability of the interview-groups; and,
- group interview with the Village-Chief, the Village-Council and the chiefs of the traditional village-based self-help-groups (*tumos*). A Venn diagram was used to list the organisations with which the village was in contact (Step 1.1).

Six separate group interviews with chief and council, old men, young men, women, entrepreneurs and members of the self-help-groups were then undertaken. Using the Venn diagram developed in Step 1.1, village relationships with different organisations were

described (Step 1.2). We analysed each organisation's role according to the following criteria (this example uses the Livestock Department).

- purpose of interaction (vaccination of animals);
- method of interaction (coming unexpected and forcing the villagers);
- kind of goods and services received (money per sheep, food);
- degree of satisfaction (not satisfied);
- reaction in case of dissatisfaction ('we prayed to God'); and,
- desired changes ('we want to do it on our own').

Table 1. Village procedures

Steps	Actors
0 Contact Phase	
0. Information Campaign	Village Assembly
1 Research Phase	
1.1 Reveal the organisations with which the village has contact (Venn diagram)	Village Chief, Village Council, tumo chiefs
1.2 Describe and analyse the contact between the village and organisations in group interviews (Interaction diagram)	Village Chief and Village Council, old men, young men, women, entrepreneurs, members of self help groups.
1.3 Compare the results of analysis of the different organisational forms	
2 Action	
2.1 Sketch organisational solutions for the unsatisfactory cases	Village Chief and Village Council, old men, young men, women, entrepreneurs, members of self help groups.
2.2 Sketch a procedure to realise these solutions	
2.3 Vote the priority list	Village Assembly
2.4 Charge a committee with the detailed elaboration of solutions	
2.5 Develop operational details of the solutions	Village Committee, and other decision making units in the village and external facilitators
2.6 Develop a procedure to realise solutions	
3 Realisation Phase	

Figure 1 is an example of an Interaction Diagram. This is a methodology developed by us to enable local people to visualise and explore their relationships with different organisations. It describes and evaluates the interaction between a village (depicted as a hut) with the local administration (flag) and donor projects (car). The mode of interaction (e.g. notes for paying taxes; syringe for vaccination) are supplied with a plus or minus depending on whether the villagers are satisfied with the good/service received or not.

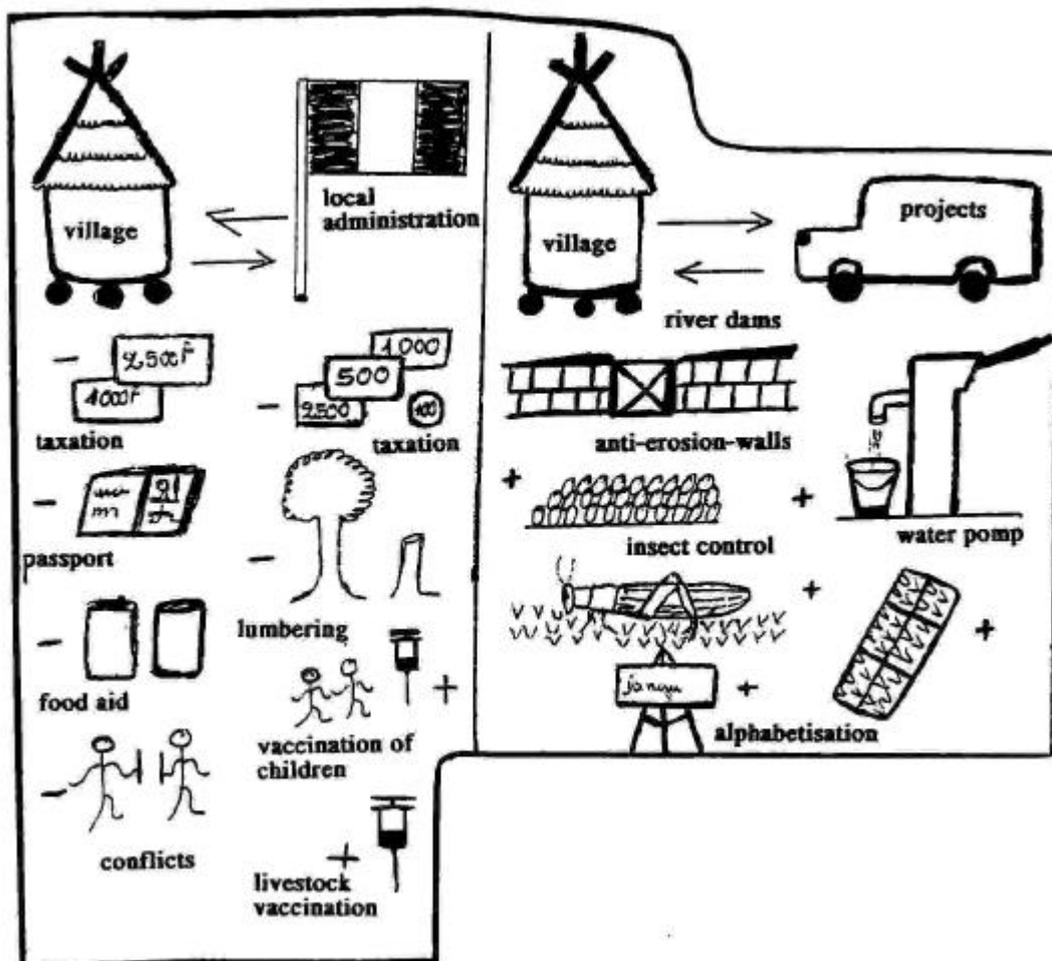
The last section of each interview or meeting encouraged the villagers:

- to compare different organisational forms, taking into account their different capacity to satisfy people's needs (Step 1.3: "We are always satisfied with what our self-help-groups offer while there is permanent dissatisfaction with the state's agencies");
- to suggest a more adequate organisational form (Step 2.1: "We want to do the vaccinations on our own"); and,
- to propose a direction of how to achieve this solution (Step 2.2 "First of all we have to organise a village-assembly").

When all the interviews are completed, each group presented its findings during a village-assembly. Building on the findings, a list of problems with the present-day administration (e.g. vaccination, forest management, taxation,) is compiled by the facilitators, discussed and voted by the assembly (Step 2.3). This list formed the preliminary workplan for a village-committee which is elected by the assembly (Step 2.4).

The committee is charged with defining the village organisational proposals more precisely (Step 2.5: "In order to manage the vaccinations on our own, villagers have to be trained and pharmaceutical equipment has to be available"). Furthermore, the Committee must develop an implementation strategy (Step 2.6: "Who do we contact for training?, Which villagers will we send?") and oversee the realisation of the objectives. The committee is not a decision-making body but an advisory-council to the village. It is assisted by external facilitators who visit the village each month.

Figure 1. Interaction diagram
 The figure is copied from the findings of the young men of Eze by Dingué Nantoumé.



• **The integration of women**

Institutional change requires the full participation of all villagers. We tried to enhance the integration of women who, in the Dogon-context, are marginalised in decision making process and in their access to and control of resources.

When establishing the priority-list of problems (see Step 2.3), we rated the statements of the women (one group) and the three male groups (chief and council, old men, young men) as 1 to 1. We tried to enhance a strong representation of women in the committees. For certain topics we encouraged the committee to address women separately.

Finally, we constantly supported the participation of women, especially the female members of the committee.

• **Achievements**

An evaluation in December 1995 found many of the village committees to be dynamic in terms of the activities undertaken e.g. contacting other villages, preparing proposals etc. Furthermore, the committees have been elected by the village and not appointed by the elders. There are many young people, men and women on the committees mandated to discuss issues of self-governance and present proposals to the local administration. However, the committees still value the external facilitators both for the information

and motivation they provide. As funding for this project draws to a close, the village committees will work directly with the personnel of Molibemo for information.

On a village level, the change-oriented PRA empowered the people not only to discuss decentralisation, but to look actively for solutions that promote self-administration. On an inter-village level, the frequency of contacts has increased. This is the first time that village have met to discuss novel topics, such as self-administration. Previous meetings had addressed traditional topics of organising religious festivals or resolving conflict.

Villages have developed proposal to address their problems with the current administration. These have concerned a wide range of issues, including forest management, health, infrastructure, legal conflicts, food aid and livestock vaccination. Until the autonomous local self government structures are in place, these proposals have had to be implemented at the village or inter-village level. For example, in forest management, some villages elected a village forest policeforce, decided on protected areas and negotiated with other villages the mutual acceptance of these measures.

• Conclusions

Local institutional landscapes have to be shaped according to the principle of subsidiarity if long term development benefits are to accrue to local people. This example suggests that an abstract concept like subsidiarity is practicable in development co-operation.

We were neutral in our facilitation, however, villagers oriented their solutions towards the principles of subsidiarity. This may be because approaches, such as decentralisation and self-reliance, are compatible with the traditional mode of administration. Furthermore, villagers are totally alienated from public administration.

It is not possible for the villagers to return to a pre-statal administrative situation. However, negotiations with the administration about the transfer of resources and areas of responsibility are initiated by the project. This

is made possible in the framework of the current decentralisation-policy.

The process of institutional change in Mali is long-term and still in progress. We have learned that successful devolution of an administrative system requires people to be empowered as stakeholders in the process.

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