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PITFALLS OF PROJECTS-DRIVEN INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES:

THE CASE OF PRIVATISATION OF AGRICULTURAL SERVICES IN BENIN

Ismail Moumouni, Silvere Tovignan, Mohamed N. Baco, Guy Nouatin

Email: ismailmm@gmail.com

University of Parakou, Faculty of Agriculture, BP: 123 Parakou, Benin

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Abstract

Understanding how local stakeholders participate in designing and implementing development projects is important to improve their effectiveness. This study used three case studies of privatisation reform of agricultural research and extension in Benin, to analyse recent trends in the participation of farmers, public and private organisations in implementing and designing reforms. Thematic and comparative analyses were performed on qualitative data collected during direct observation and semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders. The finding indicated that although participation was generally considered as requirement for developing high quality services, its importance in designing appropriate service delivery and funding reforms was underestimated or ignored.

Keywords: Agricultural research and extension; Benin; Development project; Privatisation

1. Introduction

Participation has been one of the most successful paradigms in the field of agricultural development during the past two decades in developing countries (PRETTY and CHAMBERS, 1994; GUIJT and SHAH, 1998; CHAMBERS, 2002). However, its practice in the field revealed to be very complex (PRETTY and VODOUHE, 1997; NOUATIN, 2004). In agricultural development programmes (ADP), participation is usually referred to as the involvement of farmers or rural communities in diagnostic, setting up objectives, planning actions, resources mobilisation, the implementation and the assessment of the developmental activities (LAVIGNE DELVILLE, 1992). Participation is expected to create and maintain communication among researchers, extension workers and farmers. Such partnership requires mutual trust and a favourable environment for developing large impact, sustainable and effective results (SCHMIDT et al., 1998). Donors perceive participation as a way to increase the chances of success of ADPs. Many studies reported on the use and success of participatory approaches in developmental activities (SCHMIDT et al., 1998; CONROY and SUTHERLAND, 2004; HUMPHRIES et al., 2005; DALSGAARD et al., 2005; NYEKO and OLUBAYO, 2005). However, after implementing the participatory approaches in ADPs for several years, the success recorded in the field is qualified (YABI, 2004). It is worth wondering about and re-examining the recent use of these approaches in the whole process of patterning and implementing agricultural reforms that donors promote through ADPs. Involving all the stakeholders in the reform design process is required to develop a common representation of the rational, principles and goals of reforms and projects. Shared representations and goals are important for a successful achievement of collective action (TAJFEL, 1982). We addressed the question how local stakeholders participate in designing and implementing agricultural reforms and how this influences their behaviours with regard to development projects. Basing upon the privatisation reform of agricultural research and extension in Benin, this paper analyses the participation of local stakeholders - public and private organisations, farmers and NGOs - not only in implementing but also in designing of agricultural reforms. The specific objectives are to analyse recent trends in the (i) participation of farmers in delivery and funding of agricultural

research and extension, (ii) participation of local and national service providers in designing the privatisation reform and (iii) influences of the privatisation reform on local stakeholders' strategies. The results of this study may be of interest for agricultural policy making, donors and projects leaders in improving the chance of success and performance of ADPs.

2. Theoretical framework

We used the actor-oriented approach to account for local stakeholders' perspectives. This approach is useful in analysing the interactions between individuals/groups and interventions such as technological and institutional innovations (LONG, 1992). The actor-oriented approach is an appropriate perspective for the analysis or the deconstruction of development interventions (LONG, 2003) such as ADPs. The so-called beneficiaries of projects do not reduce their perceptions of reality simply to those defined for them by ADPs. They process their own experiences of 'projects' and 'interventions', alongside their many other experiences and livelihood concerns. The heterogeneity and diversity of social life justify the differences of perceptions that may be considered when it comes to design and implement agricultural reforms and projects (LONG, 2003). The actor-oriented approach allowed us to understand and explain how the differences of socio-professional conditions of stakeholders influenced their perceptions and interpretations of ADPs and their behaviors. Typologies of farmers' behaviours with regard to ADP have been suggested. For instance, YUNG and ZASLAVSKI (1992) referred to defensive, skirting and offensive strategies to characterise farmers' reactions to ADPs. According to OLIVIER DE SARDAN (1995), farmers' reaction based upon principles of selection of part of technological packages and diversion of objective according to their own logics. BIERSCHENCK et al. (2000) argued that African villages are in search of projects and described how players such as ex government workers, farmer and village leaders became development brokers guiding projects to catch either financial or social advantages. ADPs were presented as arena where strategic groups attempted to achieve common our conflicting goals. Such a perspective suggests that people attempt to control the participation arena that ADPs offer. BIGGS (1989) described how people participate in ADP and identified different types of participation according to degrees of actors' involvement and control over decision-making. (i) In contractual participation, one stakeholder group is owner of the process and keeps decision-making power. The other partners are formally or informally 'contracted' to participate to activities defined by the owner. (ii) Consultative participation supposes that key decisions are kept with one stakeholder group, but emphasis is put on consultation and gathering information from other actors, especially for the identification of constraints and opportunities, priority setting and/or evaluation. (iii) There is collaborative participation when different actors collaborate on more equal footing, stressing linkage through knowledge exchanges and sharing decision-making power during the process. Finally, (iv) there is collegiate participation when different stakeholders work together as colleagues or partners. Ownership and responsibility are equally distributed among partners, and decisions are made by agreement or consensus.

We used this typology to assess and analyse the level of farmers' participation in agricultural reforms, research and extension. We considered large meanings of agricultural research and extension. Agricultural research activities ranged from the thematic research to the applied research. In this research we focused on applied research. Extension included transfer of technology, information, the animation, training, assistance in problem solving and facilitation (NEUCHÂTEL GROUP, 1999). The privatisation of ARE is the act of reducing the role of government or increasing the role of private sector in these activities or in the ownership of

assets. The private sector includes private enterprises, foundations and NGOs and individual consultants (SHEKARA, 2001). ADPs usually aim at strengthening and improving agricultural services, including research and extension. According to Freud (1985), ADPs are a specific form – purpose, funding, action, organisation and time frame - of international development policy and intervention. ADPs are often referred to as intervention and institution at the same time. As reflection of the international cooperation for development, they are in the vanguard of institutional and organisational changes in developing countries.

3. Methodology

3.1. Presentation of the case studies

We checked off about twenty agricultural development projects at different stages of their implementation in Benin (MOUMOUNI, 2008). We selected the Farming System Diversification and Improvement Project (PADSE), the Special Programme for Food Security (PSSA) and the Roots and Tubers Plants Development Programme (PDRT) as case studies. These three case studies were selected for being different in many regards: working in different sectors of activities, regions of Benin, and providing different agricultural services with different intervention systems (Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of three case studies

Cases studies	Intervention sectors	Focus thematic areas and services	Financing mechanisms	Geographic region	Period of implementation
PADSE	Extension, Adaptive research	Advice in farm and income management, Diffusion of technologies such as LEC technology	Direct financial and material contributions of farmers	Whole country	1998 to 2005
PSSA	Experimentation, Adaptive research	Modern/intensive animals and vegetables husbandry	Mixed contribution (material and in cash)	Borgou, Zou, Atlantique, Oueme department	2001-2006
PDRT	Extension, inputs and credit supply, marketing, Adaptive research	Intensive production and processing of root and tuber plants	Increasing financial participation	Whole country	2001-2008

Source: own inquiry

PADSE was the first selected case study because of the large geographic region and the diversity of the thematic fields it covered. When studying the PSSA and then PDRT cases, we focussed on aspects that did not appear with the previous case study. (1) PADSE aimed at improving and diversifying farming systems. Its activities included research-development, pest management on the threshold basis (Lutte Etagée Ciblée, LEC), diversification of commodity networks, management advice (Conseil de Gestion, CdG) and rural surveys (AGOUA et al., 2001). The project was implemented from 1998 to 2005 in the northern part of (Borgou, Alibori, Zou and Collines departments) with the assistance of French Development Agency (AFD). The Cotton and Fibres research centre (CRA-CF) organised the diffusion of the LEC while many NGOs

contracted with the project to promote the CdG. (2) The PSSA programme was initiated in 2001 by FAO and Benin government with the aim to reduce malnutrition by increasing food production and availability in low income areas of Benin. An administrative and technical team was set up to implement the programme. The specific objectives of PSSA were (i) water control for agriculture and (ii) the intensification and diversification of agricultural production. The activities of PSSA covered four districts: Kandi (Borgou department), Glazoue (Zou), Tori-Bossito (Atlantique) and Dangbo (Oueme). (3) Benin government initiated PDRT in 2001 in the framework of the diversification of commodities networks. PDRT is financed by the Internal Funds for Agricultural Development, the West African Development Bank and the Benin government. The objective of PDRT was the creation of good conditions for the rationalisation of the production, processing and marketing of tubers (yam, potato, and so forth) and roots especially cassava in the country.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Over four months, we conducted iteratively two to four semi-structured interviews with two staff members of the ministry of agriculture, six leaders of ADPs (two leaders for each case study), six leaders of farmer organisations (two leaders for each case study), six groups of farmers (two groups for each case study) and 45 individual farmers (15 for each case study). We supplemented the interviews by direct observation (METTRICK, 1994). The data collected included information about the history of the selected ADPs, their objectives and intervention systems, the services they proposed to farmers, the involvement of farmers in delivering and funding ARE services and the reactions of local stakeholders to ADPs' strategies. We performed a thematic and comparative analysis, and the important themes that emerged were compared and contrasted. Systematic analyses were carried out at (i) the interfaces between ADPs and local stakeholders (farmers and NGO), and the reforms that ADPs promoted , (ii) new services relations between ADP and public organisations, private consultants and NGOs as displays of the implemented reforms, and (iii) the effectiveness/ appropriateness of reforms that ADP indirectly promoted and their influences on the behaviour of farmers and leaders of NGOs. In the presentation of our findings, we mentioned the major themes and sub-themes and we illustrated them with examples from the case studies.

4. Participation of farmers in delivery and funding of agricultural research and extension

Contrary to the integrated development projects of the 1980s, the current generation of development projects in Benin is more results-oriented. Under the new strategy, ADPs were driven by a small technical staff and depended less on public administration bureaucracy. This change in the monitoring modified the delivery and funding systems of ARE. First, development projects were increasingly oriented towards developing commodity network. They provided research, extension, processing, commercialisation services and facilitated access to inputs and credit for a given commodity or group of commodities. In addition, farmers associations were set up to ease intervention and collective action. PDRT, for instance, organised many services to farmers to promote tuber and root crops. Second, using a so-called "*faire faire*" approach, ADPs mandated NGOs, farmer organisations, private consultants or trainers, public research and extension organisations to provide services to farmers. Public extension especially has been substantially weakened while private ARE were promoted. The participation of farmers was considered as a strategy to improve the quality of ARE services. Two main non-exclusive strategies for involving farmers in ARE systems came into view.

4.1 Involvement of farmers in delivering agricultural research and extension services

Given that project took place in short time periods (3- 5 years) many projects' leaders concerned about the sustainability of the impacts on local people's livelihood. Project leaders recruited and trained local people to train their peer farmers to make sure that the impacts will be sustainability. These local trainers were in charge of training other villagers or providing them with technical services. Each project adapted this principle to its intervention context. We identified village observers, local relay-trainers and local trainers as three approaches to involving farmers in research and extension systems used by PADSE / CRA-CF, PADSE / CADG and PDRT respectively (Table 2).

Table 2: Some usual approaches of local trainers

Cases studies	Objectives	Approaches
PADSE	Promotion of threshold-based treatments for reducing the costs of pest management and protecting environment.	Training of village observers who followed-up the level of cotton infestation on the farms of other farmers. They advised them about the type of pesticides, doses and treatment schedule
PSSA	Planning farm activities and improvement of farm income management	Recruitment of local relay field agents who trained and assisted other farmers in filling management sheets and, calculating margins and profits and making decision.
PDRT	Promotion of tubers and roots crops	Recruitment and training of local trainers. They were in charge of livening up the organisations of roots and tubers growers and of training them on technical knowledge. Establishment of root and tuber seeds producers to self-management the network of getting new and improved varieties.

Source: own inquiry

Development projects attempted to give a sense of responsibility to local people. Local extension agents were expected to continue providing services after the projects ended. Their works were contracted out and their monthly payment often varied from 10 000 to 20 000 FCFA (15.25 to 30.50 Euro). However, no specific official regulation governed this new emerging rural profession. The local extension agents said they were proud of their partnerships with the projects and grateful for being given a sense of responsibility.

4.2 Involvement of farmers in funding agricultural research and extension

Development projects supported in the past, almost entirely, either the investment costs (houses, cars, equipment, and so forth) or the operating costs (salaries and others advantages, consumables, and so forth) of their intervention. Farmers and their organisations are now increasingly required to contribute to finance the organisation of agricultural services. The involvement of farmers in the funding is presented as a strategy of giving to the local actors a sense of responsibility and of ensuring the sustainability of the achievements of the projects. ADPs used organisational and financial incentives to encourage farmers to increasingly participate in financing ARE. We identified three major organisational and financial incentives for promoting farmer financial participation in research and extension.

- Key roles of farmers association: ADPs considered farmer associations as their first partners in their intervention areas. They associated these farmer organisations in the

selection of the farmers to be involved and asked them for contributions on behalf of their members. Farmer associations were supposed to hand over the financial responsibility to individual farmers, who took directly advantages from the activities of ADP. In the case of PADSE/CRA-CF and PADSE/CADG, district farmer organisations supported the share of farmers at the beginning. These organisations tried to hand over to their individual members. But afterwards, it was hard to collect money, especially local extension agents' salaries, from individual farmers. Farmers did not often trust the local extension workers. They did not think that the services that the extension workers provided to them merit to be paid. Farmers argued not having cash money for ARE services.

- Key roles of individual farmers: Subsequently, ADPs found an alternative way of collecting farmers' contribution to the funding of ARE services. Farmers provided local raw materials, labour and time. For agricultural experimentation or extension demonstrations, farmers made plots of land available and took care of the experimentation plots. For building experimental hen houses, the breeders-partners of PSSA provided for example sand, gravel, woods and labour. Many farmers accepted easily to pay this participation costs just because of the prestige of being partners of the projects.
- Progressive role of farmers: ADPs planned a progressive financial commitment of farmers to the payment of the income of the local extension agents. PDRT for example intended to finance entirely the income to the local extension workers during the first year, 75% the second year, and 50% the third year. From the second year on, the farmers should start supporting the complementary part so that they disburse all the funds when the project will end. But the plan did not work. In Banikoara for example, from already the second year on, farmers did not pay their share. They strongly kept in mind that the project should support everything. In case of PADSE, the activities of the village observers went completely down at the end of the project.

To sum up, ADPs put farmer associations in the centre of their cost recovery systems with the plan to decrease progressively their assistance. In addition, they started recovering material contribution and required progressively financial participation. The rational was first to make farmers aware of the usefulness and advantages of new techniques and afterwards adopt them. However, once farmers were accustomed to this assistance, it became almost impossible to reverse. This strategy was not able to ensure the sustainability of the funding of ARE. Farmers and their associations were involved in the implementation of the privatisation reform as they were concerned by ADPs' activities. They said to have not participated in the design of the reform. One may wonder how the other stakeholders, local and national service organisations, did participate in designing and implementing privatisation reforms.

5. Participation of local and national service organisations in designing and implementing the privatisation reform

The privatisation reform took place through the implementation of projects. How did local and national service providers participate in the implementation of projects or reform process? The service relations between stakeholders describe the best the privatisation reform process. In this section, we analyse how PADSE, PSSA and PDRT established private research and extension through the service relations between projects and public organisations, private consultants and NGOs. We identified three main kinds of service partnership, between ADPs and public organisations, private consultants and NGOs.

- Service partnership between ADPs and public organisations - Many development projects were oriented towards the development of commodities and driven by small teams. To reach their goals, they contracted research services mainly with the National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRAB) which included many specialised units. The Cotton and Fibres Research Centre is one of the most dynamic in contracting with development projects because it dealt with the main cash crop of the country. Some development projects, PADSE for instance, operated on the field mainly by contracting with either research or extension organisations. Conversely, PSSA carried out field work by hiring the services of public workers at part time against some financial or material advantages. In general, the public organisations were present because private players such as NGOs and farmer organisations were not often enough well qualified to provide technical services.
- Service partnership between ADPs and private consultants - Private consultants were the most sought for training farmers, their leaders or local field agents. Their interventions were punctual. Training themes varied from building farmer organisations' capacity to using agricultural techniques. PSSA provides an interesting case of training on agricultural technology. The project called for veterinarians to train breeders on a specific breeding technique, whereby a hen could raise up to 60 chicks (instead of seven on average), i.e. hers and those of others.
- Service partnership between ADPs and NGOs - NGOs were one of the most important partners of ADPs. Especially, new generation of projects, using results-based strategies, contracted with them for almost all field activities. NGOs were supposed to be closer to farmers than public organisations. Therefore, they had a better knowledge of their problems and needs. Development projects contracted mainly with NGOs for information, advisory services and capacity building mainly. NGOs employed either qualified or unqualified workers. Qualified workers were often from non-agricultural fields such as geography and sociology. They were always seeking for better jobs. NGOs had instable personal and lacked enough of technical qualification. According to many stakeholders, especially ADPs leaders, this lack of technical competence hampered the effectiveness of NGOs on the field.

International donors promoted the involvement of farmers in delivering and funding ARE services through development projects. According to individual farmers, farmer leaders, NGOs staff members and field workers, this reform of privatisation was not matter of discussion and conscientious agreement between stakeholders. National stakeholders stated that, their acceptation of proposed project designs is precondition for donors to make funding decision. Some of them thought that new project designs were often based on experiences of Latin American or south Asian countries.

6. Influences of the process of privatisation reform on local stakeholders strategies

In absence of a clear agreement on the rational, the principles and the goals, i.e. the ins and the outs of the privatisation reform, local stakeholders constructed their own understandings and representations of the ADPs. We found out that both grassroots actors, farmers and NGO, made differently strategic positioning to ensure the sustainability of their experiences and their involvement in new development projects.

6.1 The strategic positioning at farmer level

Farmers always provided the material contributions which ADPs leaders requested as precondition from any farmer who would like to take advantage of projects activities. Farmers knew that, after all, they would receive more from the project than they will have to give. Local stakeholders imagined developing projects as "money to eat". This misappropriation increasingly governed the actions of many actors, including farmers. Any field researcher or worker might have experienced wonderful illustrations. To any question, farmers tried to answer to improve their position towards eventual projects. This strategic positioning sought resource catchments rather than the acquisition of technical knowledge. As described by one farmer organisation leader, "*...agricultural development projects function like a boat that floats on a sea*". The sea represents the village and inside the farmers, like fishes. The boat floats on the surface of the sea and knows nothing about life in the depths of the sea. It crosses the sea during a given period, disturbing and polluting it. The fishes live quietly and are always ready to take advantage from anything edible coming from the boat, which is considered fully as an external actor. This representation of ADPs explains well the strategic positioning behaviour that farmers adopted.

6.2 Behaviours of NGOs' leaders and field workers with regard to the results-based strategies of donors

Development projects were increasingly result-oriented with the aim of increasing and making visible their impacts. The assessment criteria were put in term of figures; i.e. numbers of agricultural processing workshops, stores, and so forth to build, number of women organisations to train each year for instance. In fact, building infrastructures or building farmer associations' capacity is one thing; the use of these equipments and knowledge for improving their working and living conditions is another one. Beneficiaries did use many infrastructures that NGOs' activities reports presented as great achievements in several villages. For instance, many hen breeders abandoned the activity after that PSSA built a henhouse to them. ADP built many infrastructures and organised many training sessions. However, neither the infrastructures nor the acquired knowledge were properly used by farmers. The field workers were often held responsible for poor performances of NGOs. They did sometimes the jobs of the supposed beneficiaries, especially when donors' and ADPs' representatives came for field control, so that their NGO gets a good mark and ensures the continuation of the funding. The extension of the funding was more important than the effectiveness of projects. Finally the achievements of ADPs disappeared by the end of their financial supports.

7. Discussion and conclusion

Farmers, private consultants and local NGOs were included in the privatised ARE systems that PADSE, PSSA and PDRT promoted to improve the performance of projects. Then, they participated financially and materially in implementing the reform of privatisation. However, they did not participate in making decision about the choice and the appropriateness of reforms. Assistance policies are driven more by foreign development agencies (AFD for PADSE) and United Nations Organisations (FAO for PSSA, IFAD for PDRT, and so forth) than by the needs of recipient countries. NATSIOS (2006) also found that the European aid agencies tend to be more highly centralised because decision-making is undertaken in capital cities, where most of the development staff is to be found.This kind of participation of local people in development project is similar to what BIGGS (1989) refers to as contractual participation. Project leaders controlled the decision-making power. The other partners were contracted to participate in the activities.

This weak participation of local stakeholders in the design processes of development projects may explain the discrepancy in the rationale and representations of the projects we found between donors, ADP leaders, NGOs and farmers. Our result showed that farmers and NGOs attempted to take personal advantage from development projects in accordance with the representations they had of projects' interventions. Subsequently, these local stakeholders adopted strategic positions (LECOMTE and NAUDET, 2000).

Larger geographic and longer time scales analyses showed that the findings of this study are not limited to Benin. For example, the assessment of 32 development projects that were completed in many countries in the framework of German Technical Cooperation revealed they did not lead to any financial sustainability for the continuation of the projects' initiatives after the cessation of their activities (BMZ, 2000). In addition, after 20 years of the World Bank financial assistance to extension services in Nigeria, the continued reliance on external funds fostered a culture of dependence too (OMOTAYO et al., 2001). Along the same lines, FREUD et al. (2000) observed that African villages were in search of projects and described how development brokers such as ex government workers and farmer leaders tried to orient projects goals and location in the hope to benefit financial or social advantages from the implementation of the projects. "The dynamic of the rural society is to a large extent due to a competition of different (strategic) groups, opposed to one another, about the partitioning of the cake of development aid" (BIERSCHENK et al., 1991, 113). The findings of this study suggest that the design approach of development projects should also be questioned.

Many development projects attempted to involve local knowledge and expertise in improving the quality of agricultural research and extension services. However, this involvement was not promoted enough in designing agricultural reform. Donor contributed funding and ideas to initiate reform. Although stakeholders' participation is considered as a pre-requisite in the process of developing high quality agricultural services, the importance of its contribution to designing appropriate reforms of service delivery and funding systems has been underestimated or ignored. Subsequently, the privatisation reform processes initiated by PADSE, PSSA and PDRT involved actors who were not well qualified or well prepared to perform successfully new tasks. Henceforth, rethinking the intervention approaches of ADP is a key issue to address. On the light of these analyses, one may also wonder whether ADPs are effective tool for agricultural development or tool for the implementation of foreign policy in developing countries. ADPs should not be referred to as only politically neutral intervention and institution. The political dimension and the basic assumptions of policy reforms should be clearly highlighted and made clear to all the stakeholders. Local knowledge and practices on organisational changes need to be explored, considered or utilised to guide international donors and ADPs leaders when designing and promoting institutional reforms such as the privatisation.

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