

**I.A.S.C.P. CONFERENCE IN BLOOMINGTON FROM
MAY 31 TO JUNE 4, 2000**

**NATURAL RESOURCES AND DECENTRALIZATION :
LOCAL INSTITUTIONS ROLE IN CO-MANAGEMENT
AND LOCAL CONFLICTS RESOLUTION IN THE
MOPTI REGION.**

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Since the socio-political changes of 1991, Mali has opted for a development strategy closer to traditional institutions and local collectivities. This new socio-economic development strategy with its view proposes to go quite beyond everything that has been imagined till now as regards the transfert of knowledge, competence and responsibility to the basic populations.

To carry this ambitious program through, the State implemented a policy of decentralization manifesting itself in practice by the citizens and civil society's participation to public affairs management. Also, to size up the importance of this program, it's advisable to understand the stakes for the actors (State and local insitutions), the power management logic and the role of each for a connection in the socio-institutional fabric of the society in the process of democracy. The Mopti region presents a specificity that it's advisable to understand and analyse in the dynamics of the rise of collectivities and the reading of the local institutions role, socio-historical bases of the Delta region, and the related dry areas.

1. Local institutions in the socio-historical context of the region.

Traditionally, the Mopti region is characterized by the specificity of the delta system (immense basin covering a flooded area with its connections extending on two dry areas). So, the region has been a work of socio-political organizations (the administration of the Ardos and Dina in the Delta region, specific organizations at the level of the Seno Mango, Gondo or Dogon area entities, ...) that followed each other as history goes by. The main characteristics of the region is the existence of traditional institutions born from the process of management of different socio-ecological entities, which are marked by their insertion in specialized productions within hierarchical and hegemonic relations resulting from a division into social categories. In reality, there have always been in several villages of the region traditional institutions with a specific goal of local resources management (land, water, pasture land, forest, ...). In the historical domain, these structures have a lot of vocations according to names (Jowro, Ogokana, Bessema, Baba Awgal, Alamoudio) with a structuring that is proper to them but linked to the social environment, groups organization, families and linages.

Jowro : traditional leader of pasture land in the Delta region.

Bessema : local institution for agricultural management in the Delta region.

Baba awgal : local institution for fishery management in the Delta region.

Ogokana : local institution for environment management in the Dogon area.

Alamoudio : local institution for environment management in the Dogon area.

The Delta region is characterized by traditional institutions that have preserved until recently their organized forms in pasture land management at the level of leydi (socio-ecological and land entities). These institutions profit from a legitimacy due to the respect of the first occupants' rights, the priority and ownership to family sections for resource management. In the dry areas (Séno and Haire) other specific traditional institutions (Ogokana and Alamoudio) are in charge of environment management according to a precise vocation and their respective productive tradition.

For some decades, the question about the mutation and evolution of local insitutions role

is the populations' major concern with regard to decentralization. Pastoral institutions are the most affected with the frequency of land conflicts and the numerous difficulties linked to the cohabitation between pastoralists and farmers in the Delta region. It seems more and more necessary to well identify these institutions that are from social creations such as bringing answers to some concerns during a given period, and obey like all human construction the laws and evolution servitudes. Today, people wonder about their efficiency, their representativeness or their legitimacy facing the real stakes of decentralization and more specifically with regard to their future role in the management of the space of commune development.

The question about traditional structures connection and adaptation to the process of decentralization remains a concern of all the delta system actors.

Some more important people who were asked think that decentralization is decided, the principles are defined but they know very few general orientations. In this context, traditional leaders wish to progressively adapt their role to the process of decentralization as much through development as through politics.

2. Relationship evolution between administration and local institutions.

For some years, institutional practice of traditional local structures is based on organization crisis in which these structures struggle after a long supremacy exerted by the State through the administration system known till now.

The basic question is to know if local institutions are, in the present state of the process of democracy and decentralization, able to respond to political, economical and social challenges which they will be confronted with. Until recently, community and customary structures of the society have lived in the shadow of the thought and the State administration domination through chiefs of village who exert a hybrid power. These latter are the administration representatives as chiefs of village or portion but also sometimes coordinators of traditional activities for natural resources management. The tasks they were entrusted with were often inconsistent with their role of managers of natural resources and local institutions in charge of assisting the populations for the development of the society.

From Mali independence in 1960 till the birth of the new process of decentralization in 1993, the administration (administrative division leaders and technical decongested services) has exerted a supervision of ideas, organization and control of traditional institutional structures. The development action engaged since then has not often taken into account local populations cultural, identity or spiritual systems dimension.

3. Emergent local insitutions facing the stakes of decentralization.

With the evolution of the process of democracy and decentralization, local institutions more and more convince themselves of the necessity to get involved in its implementation. The task of the involvement of the civil society (N.G.O., associations, private insurance, representative structures, ...) was to reduce the deficit of information with the introduction of the methods of spreading the notions of rights, training for good citizenship and many radio debates about the institutional process.

3.1 Weaknesses of local institutions involvement in the implementation of the process of decentralization.

Local institutions distinguish more and more political speech and the practical advance of the process considering the role, function and responsibilities that are theirs with a view to appropriation or considering an intellectual assimilation of the tools of decentralization by some methods of participation, the description of work tools or the comprehension of general prerogatives devolving to deliberative organs and specific prerogatives devolving to community organizations and development associations. This role will permit integration to the process of communes management with other actors and components of the civil society.

Through exchanges and discussions, it seemed, from the observations on the field, that the State has at its disposal a series of elaborated concepts, with the support of the Decentralization Program, which are very unknown to these institutions and the comprehension of which deserves to be identified for a sensible use. This gap explains the disinterest manifested till now by the society (local institutions and populations) toward an active participation to the development of this decentralization.

So, village consultations for territorial division have not often got these institutions adhesion because badly prepared for the changes happened and remained less receptive to innovations born from this new policy. Thus, did they progressively cut themselves off from the aspirations of the committee for communes division owing to disagreement or many interpretations of village authorities having not given necessary and useful information for their comprehension.

3.2 Weaknesses of the strategies developed by development programs.

With the communal elections of June 1999, debates about the question of decentralized collectivities management reveal that neither the former development projects nor the State policies were able to create a dynamics of these traditional institutions mobilization and adhesion. The limits of these experiences reside at first in the fact that the process of organization of local community structures did not involve competences in the languages of the environment and the developed approaches didn't take into account the real actors' concerns and aspirations. One of the steps of development programs consisted in supporting some leaders and local people in charge and having a hegemonic power on the majority of populations. This reinforcement of pre-eminent powers came with the exclusion of an important part of the community to the process of decision taking and even sometimes the enjoyment from the advantages of realized investments.

Another limit of the former experiences is based on the fact that local institutions for resource management haven't, till now, had at their disposal authority or necessary capacities to negotiate with the State about the questions linked to their development (land problems, respect of rural space regulation, establishment of village security conditions, ...).

4. The new institutional environment favorable to the establishment of propitious conditions of viable local institutions emergence.

4.1 Specificity of the institutions new organizational environment.

From an organizational point of view, the new institutional environment favored the

emergence of new structures constituted of local actors (development associations, pastoralists professional federations, local organizations for production, ...). These structures are built on a legal institutional environment and they plan to quickly integrate the process of decentralization. Most of these concerned actors wish to have a position in order to have access to the necessary knowledge for their responsibilities so that they have the means to take good decisions concerning their future. These institutions want to build their space of development on condition that they are creators and actors of what they initiate.

Local institutions gather customary leaders, chiefs of village and members of local and social organizations of the region.

To take into account their interests in the new institutional context, institutions mean to structure themselves around new steps in order to contribute to their capacities reinforcement and around major axes of a coherent policy of socio-economical development. This structuring of institutions is triple.

- The first is their recognition within the civil society. This recognition goes through their insertion in the process of democracy and decentralization.
- The second is linked to the stake of these institutions actions durability that will be possible only if they take forms adapted at the same time to the society cultural values which they derive from and to the requirements of modernity (supervision of transparent management, circulation of information, ...). This supposes that a sufficient mobilization of human resources is made for a participative, efficient and democratic management of the structures called into question.
- The third is the articulation between the new institutions and other intermediary structures (private operators, N.G.O.s, Economic Interest Group, ...).

4.2 Strategy of competences reinforcement and local insitutions achievement.

The different initiatives undertaken by some development operators (Association Eveil - Civic Education and Governance in the 5th Region) express an important development of new competences reinforcement.

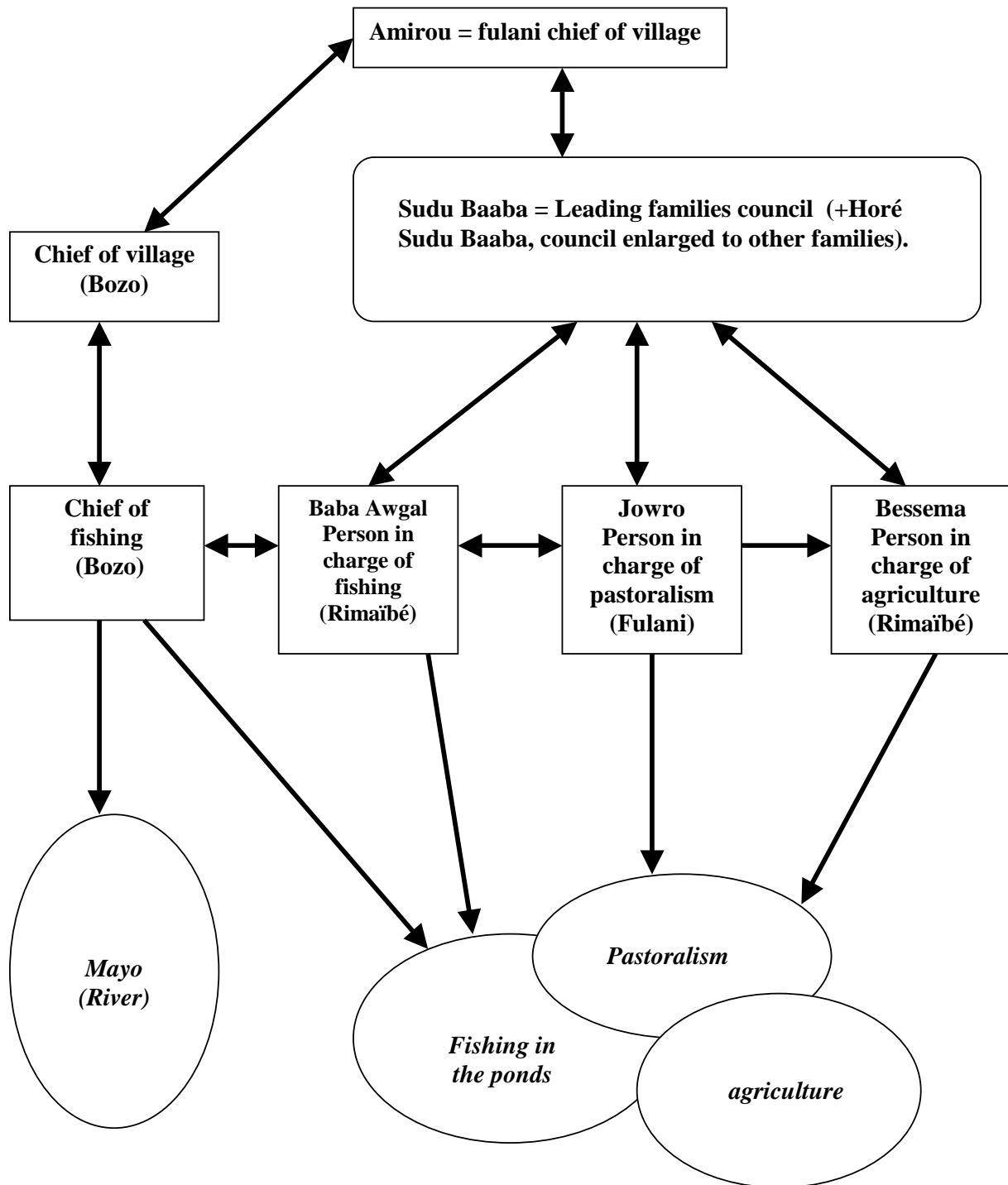
Association Eveil has at first established an institutional diagnosis of these new structures (number of local emergent institutions, domains of intervention and competences, functional analysis chart, actors' needs for training, ...). This approach permitted to record some significant achievements in the domain of human resources increase (V.R.H.) and civic conscience awakening. The handbooks elaborated by Eveil and put at the local institutions leaders' disposal constitute an appropriate pedagogical device in social actors' equipment. As such, this device implemented a system of control of these local institutions activities together with the programs and associative organizations in hand (remarks about governance, support to the civil society reinforcement and to the fight against poverty, new approaches for conflicts alternative resolution, ...). The investigations conducted on the field actually reveal a real awareness by the actors concerned with local institutions potential and interest in order to progressively integrate the dynamics of the beginnings of territorial collectivities. Eveil notices, after two years of activity, that local and institutions leaders correctly apprehend the step of entrusting responsibilities to actors through decentralization and its usefulness in expectation of available resources planning.

In reality, this situation explains itself by the fact that local institutions leaders are much

more interested in the present thoughts about decentralization. Some of them are elected at the level of the new communes. This situation favors a dynamic partnership that permits them to profit from existing structures support.

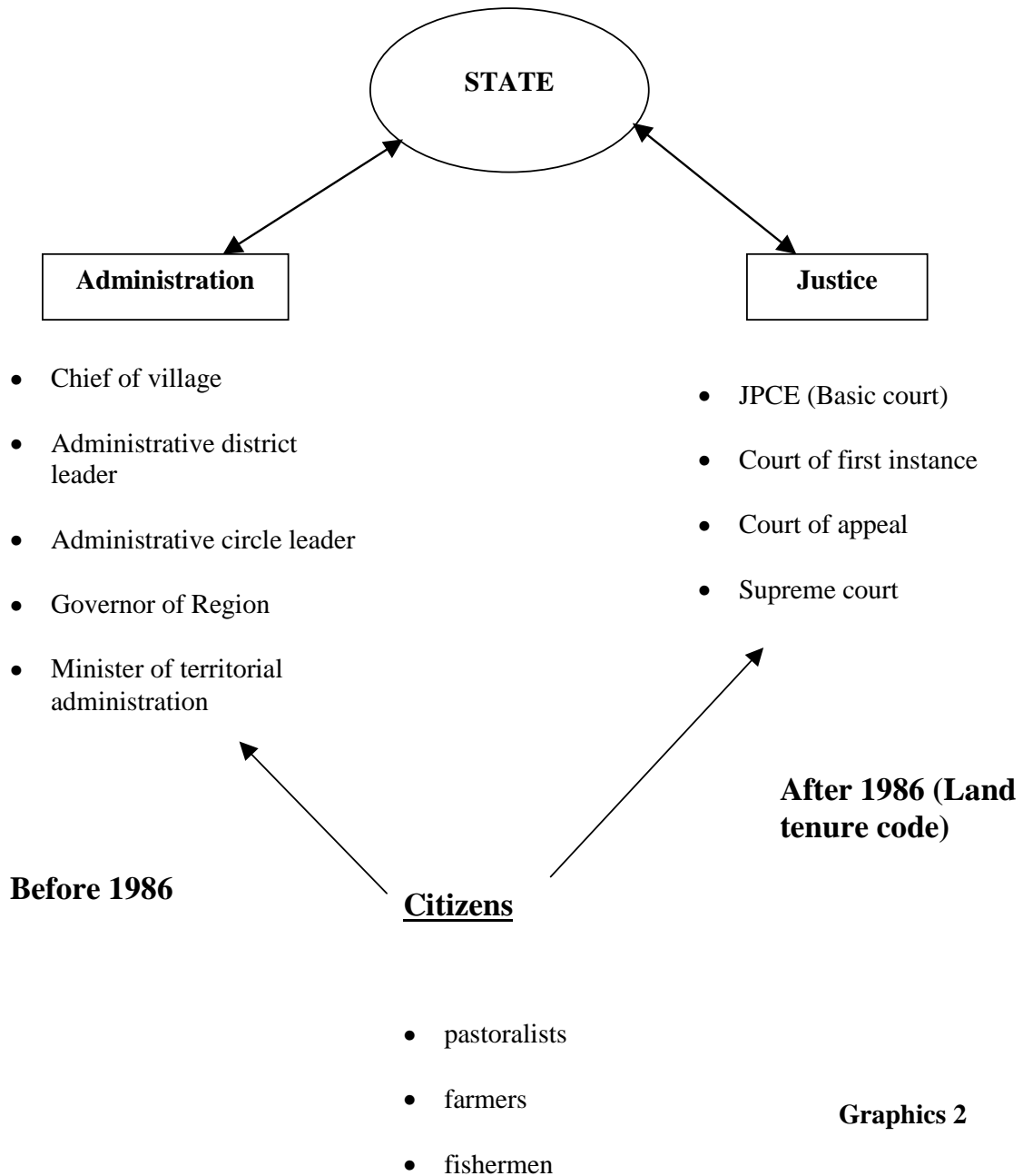
The institutional context of decentralization presently knows important mutations that are translated by a kind of partnership or co-management with local institutions. It is necessary to estimate more and more by the effort of renewal of public policies tools as regards the organizational support of community structures. These mutations are relieved at the local level by several initiatives that are : the dynamics of spreading civic education and good citizenship training, the pursuit of experience in consultation with parity of representation and decentralized at the level of the institutions in the Delta region and the enforcement of justice forum recommandations about conflicts alternative resolution.

TRADITIONAL STRUCTURES DIAGRAM IN THE DELTA REGION

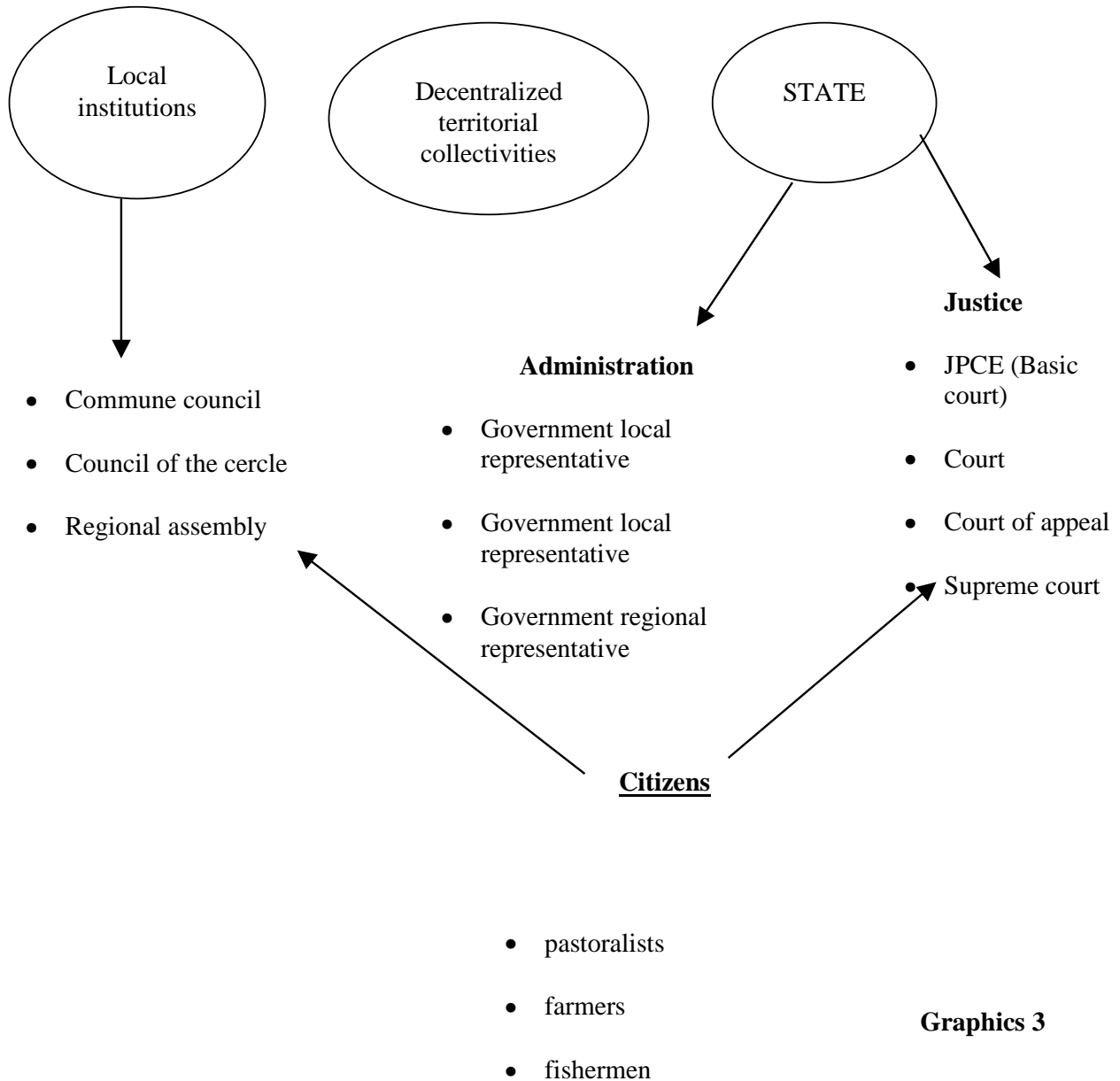


Graphics 1

**POWER SUPREMACY OF LAND CONFLICTS
MANAGEMENT BY THE STATE BEFORE
DECENTRALIZATION**

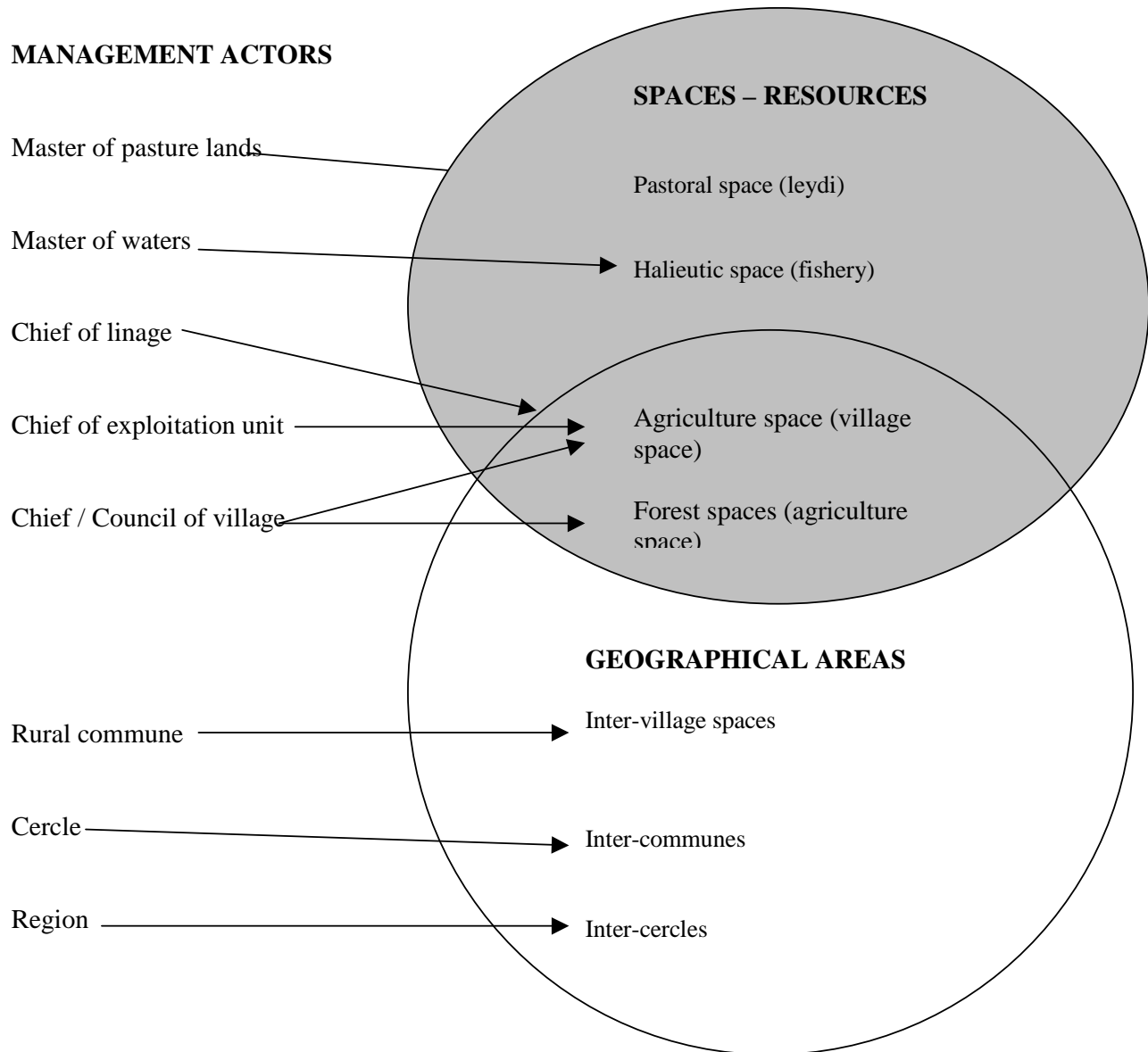


LAND TENURE MANAGEMENT IN THE DECENTRALIZATION SYSTEM : ORGANIZED CO- MANAGEMENT



Graphics 3

POWER RELATIONS IN THE DECENTRALIZATION SYSTEM : AN ORGANIZED CO-MANAGEMENT



Graphics 4

ACTORS' POWER SPACE WITH REGARD TO NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE DELTA REGION

<i>SPACES</i>	<i>ACTORS</i>	<i>POWERS</i>
Local spaces	Local operators	Specialized mastery (short or medium-term management)
Village spaces	Chief / Council of village	Land conflicts mediation
Rural commune	Commune council + Council + Chief of village + master of waters + Chief de lineage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Global management : sensitization, control of resources regulation - Technical support to communes - Land conflicts mediation
Cercle	Council of cercle + local institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Global management - Local adaptation of regulation concerning resources - Conflicts mediation
Region	Regional assembly + civil society representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Global management - Elaboration of resources regulation, exploitation, management and preservation - Technical support and control - Land conflicts mediation.
State	Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Global management : global policy - Legislation, surveys, research, control, technical assistance to managers.