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Village Management Committees in Malidino Community Reserve, Senegal. From Biodiversity Conservation to Social Division

This paper examines the role of external agencies in the institutional empowerment of local actors engaged in natural resource management in the Malidino Biodiversity Community Reserve in Senegal. The Community is a project initiated by the World Bank and the Senegalese government in 2002. The declared goal of the project is transferring power to Local Collectivities for the management of natural resources such as land, forests, non-timber forest products, and community-based reserves. In order to explore whether genuine decentralization of power over resource management has indeed occurred or not, the paper examines the structures of the village management committees that the World Bank and the Senegalese government created for resource use and management of the Malidino reserve. Because the chairs of these committees are traditional authorities such as village chiefs, spiritual guides, Imams, or wealthy men, the paper argues that the choice and recognition of these actors as key decision-makers over resource management, is in fact inconsistent with democratic decentralization objectives. The main research questions for the present study include: Why do the Senegalese government and the World Bank put in place village management committees instead of working with Local Collectivities? What are the implications of the choice and recognition of these village management committees for democracy and equitable development of the commons? The study is based on extensive ethnographic research in the Biodiversity Community, which involved participant observation, interviews, and focus group discussions.

Introduction

Since 1996 Senegal has embarked upon a new step in the decentralization process, referred to as regionalization. Regionalization refers to a transfer of power from the state to local collectivities. Decree no 96-1134 of December 27th 1996 gave competences to local collectivities in natural resource management such as land, forests (non-protected), non-timber forest products and tree use. The main institutions involved in natural resources decentralization in Senegal are: the government and its administrative bodies (administrative decentralization), local collectivities (democratic decentralization), and local institutions (social and political networks at the local level), and development agencies as donors.

The democratic institutions involved in natural resource decentralization are the local collectivities composed of the region, the commune, and the Rural Community. The local collectivities and their councilors (men and women) are elected for five years. At the local level, the Rural Council (composed of the Rural Council President and his elected councilors) is in charge of all issues related to natural resource management in the

Rural Community, of the drafting of local development plans, and implementation of any development and environment projects.

Malidino Biodiversity Community Reserve is a project of the Senegal Sustainable and Participatory Energy Management Program (SPEMP/PROGEDE) initiated by the World Bank and launched in Senegal in December 1997. PROGEDE has three main objectives and domains of intervention: Biodiversity Conservation program and the promotion of private sector-based fuel substitution and improved stoves initiatives. This program can be placed in the larger political economic context of the World Bank's objectives on environmental sustainability, desertification mitigation, rural poverty alleviation, and energy and economic efficiency. For this study I will focus on the Biodiversity Conservation program specifically the management of Malidino Biodiversity Community Reserve.

The MBCR has a surface of 10,059 ha and is surrounding by ten villages with two main ethnic groups, the Peul and Mandika. The process of the reserve creation has started in 1998 and was officially recognized as a Community-Based Reserve in 2002. Three specific objectives in MBCR are related both to development and natural resource management. 1) Infrastructures and material support: the construction of a main road and a bridge for the opening up of the areas which very remote and impracticable during the raining season; the materials distributed are millet grinder, technologies for wildfire and for beekeeping. 2) Support for activities such as market gardening, intensive farming, poultry farming, livestock, and beekeeping; the support can be based on seeds and material distribution, and trainings. 3) Biodiversity inside the reserve. The third environmental objective is related to the developmental objectives in the sense that income generating activities and food supplies, seeds, and material distribution are developed in order for people to better take care of resources. It has been implemented by the Senegalese government (via the Water and Forestry Department) and the World Bank who have put in place the principles and management models, and defined the management action plan.

According to the natural resource decentralization policy, the implementation of a community-based reserve refers to the following process: the identification by Local Collectivities of areas that could be of interest for biodiversity conservation; the limits and deliberation of the area by the Local Council; and the approval by the trust minister through a decree. But when it comes to the management at the village level, the Rural Council delegates its power in resource management to the local population; and when there is a rural councilor in the locality this one can serve as a liaison between the Rural Council and the population.

This delegation of power in management to the population is due to the fact that the management of Community-Based Reserves is not a transferred power in the decentralization context. The transfer of power is only limited in the creation of the reserve. There are no decentralization laws and rules that define how the different actors in CBRs should be chosen, their prerogatives; and how they should be accountable and responsive to local people's needs. The intervening institutions such as the World Bank

and the WFD are the ones who define and put in place a Management Action Plan instead of working on that with the Rural Council. By so doing the implementation of the Management Plan based on their own approaches and the integration of social organization in respect to tradition and the people's way living. Therefore the management of CBRs cannot be democratic because the Management Action Plan does not follow any principles and mechanisms of democratic decentralization. In the case of Malidino since its official recognition as CBR no Management Action Plan has been put in place. It is the local population who has been the managing and establishing their own rules.

In its habitual intervention strategy the Water and Forestry Department provokes the creation of the management committees that serve as an interface between the villages and the intervention structures. The management committees establish the code of conduct for resource use and management, and use customary laws of conflict resolution. The Water and Forestry Department and the World Bank have created local institutions through reserve management committees such as the Village Management and Development Committee (VMDC), the Surveillance Committee, the Wise Council, and the Inter-villages Management Committee (IVMC). The Inter-villages Management Committee (CIVGD) federates the different committees in the villages surrounding the reserve and authorizes the different forms of usages of the resources in the reserve, which are forests, non-timber forest products, and land. It is the central body in the decision-making of the reserve management. The chair of the CIVGD is liaison officer and the direct intermediary between the populations and the WFD and the World Bank. In collaboration, the Water and Forestry Department and the World Bank define the orientations and policies of the reserve. The chairs of the management committees are generally selected from pre-existing traditional authorities such as villages' chiefs, spiritual guides, Imams, or wealthy men. The village chiefs are either president of VMDC, or members of sage council or surveillance, or all three (Boutinot, 2004).

The main problem in delegating power to local people in forestry resource management and land use is the fact that it stops the democratic process which should imply greater civic participation, empowerment of local governments who are representative of and accountable to local populations. As stated by (Ribot 2002), democratic decentralization assumes a secure autonomous domain of powers to make and implement meaningful decisions. Also through democratic decentralization local governance is improved because populations make decisions for the use of local resources, they have ownership, and marginalized groups are integrated.

The WFD and the World Bank politics of choice and recognition of Malidino Management Committees have created new institutions, mechanisms, and effects which are inconsistent with natural resources decentralization objectives.

They have empowered villages chiefs, headmen, customary, traditional, and religious leaders, and wealthy men at the local level. This creates new local institutions and poles of power that conflict and weaken the local government's power. Local governments are consulted by the intervening institutions and the local leaders only when

it comes to sign official documents even though they disagree with the management procedures and mechanisms.

There is an equation of participatory approaches with decentralization, which are two different democratic methodologies and politics. Through participatory approaches there are recognition and legitimacy of non-democratic mechanisms based on nomination, designation, and inheritance. These principles give power to traditional authorities and weaken the marginalized groups. Therefore, equating participation with decentralization and giving power to local institutions could be misleading and produce non-democratic outcomes at the local level.

Hypotheses and Questions

Hyp.1. Traditional authorities (village chiefs, religious leaders, higher castes leaders, and wealthy men) are more representative and accountable to the population than are elected Rural Councilors.

Q. 1. How are traditional authorities accountable and responsive to people?

Hyp. 2. Women are not empowered, have no decision-making Village Management Committees (VMCs).

Q. 1. How are women represented and participate in VMCs decision-making?

Hyp. 3. The Water and Forestry Department and the World Bank approaches in Community-Based Management are inconsistent with democratic decentralization objectives.

Q. 3. What are the effects of the intervening institutions? And how are they inconsistent with democracy?

The politics of Choice

Donors such as the World Bank either support the government in its priorities when it matches with their politics or impose their conditionalities. If the one considers the overall program of PROGEDE in which the Malidino reserve project is included, the World Bank's conditionality is "the liberalization of the energy sector, mainly the charcoal market production". And when it comes to biodiversity conservation, the discourse is about poverty alleviation and access to and rational use of resources by the rural people. Since the 1990s the environmental discourse and policies of developing countries and development agencies have undergone significant change. Attention has shifted from top-down and authoritarian approaches in the field of conservation to

community based natural resource management (Ribot,...). Community-based conservation, participation, democracy, and decentralization have become part of the conventional rhetoric and more attention is being paid to these approaches at the local level by government, donors, development agencies and international and national conservation organizations.

Questioning the sustainability of policy reform in Senegal, Utting and Jaubert (1999) argue that it has come about largely in response to foreign influences and donor conditionality rather than any national movement or pressure. Under pressure from the donor community, significant reforms were introduced in the 1990s that have aim to increase the influence of peasant organizations in local decision-making processes. Many developing countries have decentralized some aspects of their natural resources “for multiple political, economic, social, and ideological reasons, and often with support and pressure of aid agencies” (Ribot, 2002). Decentralization, participation, and community-based natural reserve are international institutions and national government discourses. Donors such as the World Bank, participate in decentralization through the implementation of budgetary support policies and through their diverse neo-liberal models of governing the rural world (Chauveau, 1994).

The World Bank through its developmentalist views focuses on the political and economic aspects of decentralization, which it considers to play an important role in public service performance, and political and macroeconomic stability (Crook and Manor, 1999; World Bank, 2000; Ribot and Larson, 2004). Ribot (1999) critiquing developmentalism and environmentalism underlies that in the 1980s the developmentalist view of the Third-World State flipped from a progressive force of change and modernization to a backward primordial arena of greed, hindering development; a parallel flip is underway in environmentalism. People and local communities have turned from being viewed as environmental villains, destroying nature through ignorance; greed and need to be heroes whose local knowledge and affinity with nature will save the earth’s threatened resources (see also Ferguson, 1996; Agrawal, 1997; and Shiva, 1989).

There are two main reasons behind the politics of choice and recognition of VMCs in Malidino reserve. The first one is based on the WFD and the World Bank participatory methodologies and approaches which aim to include the population in the decision-making; and their perceptions of decentralized institutions as driven by political parties and not accountable and responsive to people’s needs.

The first reason is that, using participatory methodologies and approaches, they believe that external actors should respect people’s tradition, culture, and way of living. Traditionally at the local level, traditional authorities are the ones who hold power in decision-making, define the rules; and they are nominated through inheritance or by a group of people who are generally the elders, spiritual guides, and wealthy people. In the case of Malidino management, there is a reproduction and legitimacy of customary and traditional authorities, laws and rules.

But the problem is that participation often lacks real substance (Brainbridge et al., 2000) and community differences are simplified, power relationships poorly understood, and conflicts avoided or ignored (Guijt and Shah, 1998). In project design and implementation, relatively little attention has been given to the unequal division of labor, power, and resources between women and men in societies and between different groups of women within communities (class, age, race, ability, sexuality, ethnicity). Since natural resource decentralization involves power relations, differences, diversity of actors and complexity of goals, the concept of “community-based resource management” should be considered as diverse. There is no unity in class, gender, ethnicity, and caste communities (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999; Brockington, 2004). Local communities consist of many different people with different power positions, priorities and perceptions and they raise the question which these competing viewpoints are privileged. However, in many natural resource management or conservation projects community differences are simplified and power relationships poorly understood. Related to Joint Forest Management institutions, Cornwall (2003: 1329) states that they “tend to reproduce existing structures and dynamics of gendered power and exclusion”. As such, they serve to exemplify “the problem of treating communities as ungendered units and community participation as an unambiguous step toward enhanced equality” (Agarwal, 1997: 1374).

The second reason is that the WFD and the World Bank “believe that Local Collectivities as well as the Government are political entities that could be far away from being aware of the local realities”. If one considers the case of Malidino reserve, Dialamakhan, which is 20km from the Rural Community headquarters where the Rural Council is located there are only two elected councilors in the village center of the Malidino reserve and in the other villages there is no elected rural councilor. The Rural Council does not have financial means to visit all the villages on the Rural Community. There are villagers where the President of the Rural Council and his Councilors have never been. According to the WFD agents, the decentralized institutions or the Rural Council in the case of Malidino should not be idealized because they are political entities more concerned about political parties’ matters and electoral votes than people’s needs. The Rural Councilors who are elected are not more legitimate than the people nominated at the local level because they are all population representatives from different settings.

The effects of the Politics of Choice and Recognition

A reaffirmation of traditional authorities and rules.

By creating the VMCs the World Bank and the WFD have reaffirmed village chiefs, headmen, customary and religious leaders, and wealthy men at the local level. As a result, the choice and recognition of VMCs have reinforced traditional power based on local rules and traditional conflict management and resolution that are very often based on inequity and inequality.

The WFD suggested that a charter with the rules and laws be put into place by the CIVGD utilizing the Traditional authorities, Village Chiefs and the Responsible parties in

the Reserve. Its objective is to regulate the use of the forest in order to conserve the biodiversity. The Rural Council, the WFD, and the Sage Council approved the charter. The charter introduces rules regarding forest fires, use of traditional methods for the collection of honey, hunting and chopping of trees. The responsible parties swore on the Curran, the traditional authorities, and a portion of the population to uphold the rules and laws. This was a way for them to react psychologically as their faith – Islam – is the dominant religion in the region and the local population has a high respect for the faith. We swore and recite on the first SOURATE of the Koran that we will not start a fire and that we will respect the forest (CIVGD President). There is a true belief that when you swear on the Curran you are held to your word if not bad things will happen. “When governments and international agencies empower local authorities, they are enforcing upon the members of the groups the particular forms of comportment of the chosen authorities” (Ribot, 2005). There isn’t any form of sanction the population can develop to hold traditional authorities accountable to them; in the contrary, traditional authorities, political parties leaders, wealthy and powerful men are the ones who establish the code of conduct in access to and use of forestry resources and land.

A Tyrannical Majority

The land issue

Malidino reserve is located on the periphery of Niokolo Koba National Park, and a portion of the reserve is location in N’diambour classified forest (or state owned forest). The population is wedged in between the Park, the classified forest, and the reserve, therefore reducing the available land for cultivation. Before the project for the Reserve was presented by the WFD the local population brought up their concerns about the small amount of land for cultivation and called on the Senegalese Government to allocate a portion of land from the Park and the classified forest for cultivation.

The main problem surrounding the Reserve is that the population was requested not to cultivate their fields because of the agricultural principles of the reserve that excluded the clearing and farming of the land. The farmers preferred these lands, as they were more fertile. In demanding that the farmers cultivate other fields it reduced their production and, or required the use of natural and chemical fertilizers. As abandoning the fields was not in the best interest of the farmers, not everyone agreed with the idea of using new land outside the reserve. The forced relinquishing of the fields created many conflicts between the people; there were demonstrations of the frustrations. The villagers saw similarities between the request for the reserve and what took place during the Colonial Period and just after the Independence in 1960’s, as dozens of villagers were forced out of the park. However, the leaders imposed their point of view, the majority opinion within the decision making team was taken.

Despite abandoning the land the reserve is still presented as a Community Interest because of the promises made by the Water and Forestry Department. According to the CIVG President “if we leave these fields in the reserve we will be conserving the resources as WFD would like, and there will be additional projects in the reserve that will

benefit the population. Even I had fields that were in the reserve and I was the first to abandon them”. Not only did he convince certain people of the need to conserve the biodiversity and financial gain that could arrive from the sell of the crops. He also reinforced his objective because those that refused to leave their lands would be excluded from the production in the reserve and would not benefit from the food supplies and seeds distribution from the WFD to the population.

The Inter-Villages Management Committee (CIVG) President who had served as liaison with the WFD and the people since the creation of the reserve and whom all the villagers recognized as a father, tried to convince all the villagers of the need to abandon the fields within the reserve. One of the villagers that had recently abandoned his lands stated, “The entire village is afraid of him and does not dare to state the truth. With the absence of contradiction, he did what he wanted. We have abandoned our lands in spite of ourselves without any compensation”. The villagers have been farming in the reserve for over 70 years, as they know that the land on the other side is rocky and difficult to exploit. A farmer stated: “Last year I cultivated 1.5 hectares of new earth but I was unable to even harvest 1/3 of the normal production. I was not able to pay back the loans that I took to plant.”

The politics of Biodiversity Conservation

The political aspect of the donation and the receipt of it were very visible throughout the process of the creation of the reserve as the interest of the WFD and the World Bank was different than that of the general population. During a time when the National and International Institutions were preoccupied by biodiversity conservation and the protection of the park, the people were only asking for daily survival through access to employment opportunities so that they could provide food and shelter.

The WFD requested that the population conserve the resources found in the reserve and in exchange they would build an animal park in the reserve, and a camp ground, which would generate employment and give the villagers a way to earn a living, raising poultry, gathering honey, and building roads; handing out seeds and helping to sow. They therefore demanded that the farmers abandon their land and in exchange gave them fertilizer to plant the new earth. A female president of the group explained, “The WFD representatives told us: This is what we want and if you agree this is what we can do for you.”

The gendered interests and concerns refer to the fact that women’s social and economical needs and interests are different from that of men, and intervening institutions. In Malidino, while men and the WFD and the World Bank are focused on the reserve; women are concerned about a main road that can open up the area for them to be able to go to the city to sell their market gardening products, school for their children, and maternity hospital for pregnant women in the area who usually give birth in harsh conditions (women are carried on horseback for 25km to go to the nearest hospital in *Dialacoto*). The relationships between the different stakeholders involved power relations because they have different concerns, objectives and interests. The state and donors are

more concerned about international, national, and rural economic growth while women are concerned about their daily life.

The global politics of natural resource management based in economic development framework give rise to new ways of governing the resources creating inequality and conflicts in access to and control over resources. In Malidino women play an important role when fire occurs in the forest; they carry water for long distance to help men put out the fire. This is unpaid and voluntary work. Women are used as an economic instrument of unpaid labor by the state and its national structures to serve the purpose of political campaign; also there is the peculiar political manipulation and women's co-optation by development agencies to realize their environment programs (Schroeder R., 1993). Decentralization has instrumental managerial interests (Oyono, 2004); it refers to instrumental goals of intervening agencies (Ribot and Larson, 2004) and instrumental objectives of donors programs (Shivaramakrishnam, 2000). "Donors pre-specify the objectives that local people are supposed to adopt as their own – or 'participate in' – while creating incentives for project managers to achieve these objectives through specific success indicators (Baviskar, 2004)".

Exclusion and Marginalization

Although the reserve was presented with future interest, there were people who were still hesitant about abandoning their lands. The people who expressed hesitation were marginalized and excluded from all reserve activities. Therefore the majority of the population was in agreement as they were afraid of being excluded. This majority was not democratic but tyrannical because it was based on the manipulation, sanctions, and exclusion. "If anyone is stronger than you and demands that you leave something you are obligated to do it. Even if I'm not in agreement with the creation of the reserve I never had a choice as the majority ruled. Almost all the women had land in the reserve however they were obligated to follow their husband's decisions (a member of one women's group)". Even the traditional authorities the Imam and the Village Chief gave into the decision made by the President of the CIVGD and the WFD. The Imam stated, "even if I am not in agreement there is nothing I can do. Since we have abandoned our fields in the reserve, we do not have enough land and the crops are not large enough."

The reserve was presented as if it was in the best interest for everyone from a financial standpoint that would create an adhesion between the administration, traditional authorities, and the community. Anyone who did not accept the ideas presented by the leaders of the CIVGD; who refused to collaborate with the majority that was guided by the propaganda and manipulated; or who developed control mechanisms over the CIVG were excluded or marginalized.

The exclusion and marginalization are also tied to ethnical questions and the origin of birth and the social and cultural aspects in the locality. The village of Dialamkhan, which is located in the center of the reserve where all the decision was made, has an ethnic majority Peul; there were only two concessions made for the

Mandinka in the village. At the creation of the reserve the Mandinka families refused to abandon their farms. These Mandinka were excluded in the distribution of seeds and food supplies from the WFD. Following this, the head of the Mandinka family, who had a position in the Village Management Committee (VMC) resigned. A head of a family Wolof who lived in the village but was not originally from there was also excluded from the seed and food supplies distribution because he as well had a position within the VMC. The father stated: "I pay the taxes so I am part of the village. The distribution of food supplies and seeds is done between parents, friends, and family, and between the people who are part of the political party of the CIVGD president.

Generally forms of exclusion and marginalization of this sort would solicit a reaction from the Village Chief or Imam who are the administrative and religious authorities in the village. But in this case we see an authority figure that is above all other authorities. This is due to the power of the creator of the reserve that was given to the president of the CIVGD. As also declared by the village Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) advisor, "Village Chief and the Imam are on the same side as the president of the CIVGD because each time that the food supplies and seeds arrive they get their share. Therefore they are careful not to critique anything." Thus there is no disciplinary action for the President and those responsible for the reserve. Contrarily, they are the ones that have set in place rules and processes to control anyone that decides to act up. The Village Chief, Imam, and successive CIVGD presidents explain their collaboration by the fact that their roles are separate but complimentary. The Village Chief is in charge of village administrative affairs, Imam religious affairs, and as the reserve is of community interest the entire village should join in "Whenever a project can help you, you must do the maximum for so that the benefits will come to the village. If someone comes to help you do something that you cannot do yourself, you must give the best of yourself (*Dialamakhan* Village Chief). Because the villagers are not educated they believe that the people who are intervening in the project know better than them, they accept all that is proposed.

Even though the CIVGD president is devoted to the cause and has an environmental consciousness, his power results in financial means and materials from the WFD. He is the primary coordinator and decision maker in generating activities such as market gardening and the collective orchard, and distributing the food supplies and seeds. He has the sole power to decide who is to benefit.

Favoritism, Personal and Family Interests

The favoritism between Political and traditional leaders bring up the fact that these are the people who co-opt, who nominate, and who support one another during designations or nominations. Even though, this is quite rare in the rural areas to see the traditional authorities collaborating in perfect harmony with the political authorities, in the village of *Dialamakhan* this collaboration is due to the favoritism that is granted to each other. This is why in the VMCs one finds the advisors, the village chiefs, the Imams, the elders, and the traditional Doctors. *Dialamakhan*'s Chief was co-opted and put forth

as a candidate before the General Village Assembly by the father of the CIVGD president who found in him the qualities of a chief. Consequentially even if the CIVGD president does not act democratically and fair minded, the village chief is not in a good place to criticize or to develop measures of sanction. There is a problem of population representation and participation in the committees, also a centralization of the decision-making. The responsibilities and the power are concentrated in the hands of certain category of people. Ntsebeza (2004) argues that rural residents who are dependent on hereditary traditional leadership are not citizens but subjects.

The president and his family are the only ones to benefit from interest in the reserve, while in some families no one benefits from the food supplies or only one person; In other families almost all the active adult members in the activities of the reserve production could benefit each person with 15 kg of maize, or millet, 3 liters of oil, and 5 kg of peas. This discrimination in the distribution enriches certain families and impoverishes others. Even though in these villages, during rainy season the people have a hard time finding one meal a day, in addition they have a lot of difficulty in getting a loan in order to buy seeds.

The president of the CIVGD had profited from an international trip with the WFD under the framework of a reserve project and immigrated to Spain thereby paralyzing the project because he was the primary decision maker and coordinator who had all the information. Since his departure the WFD agents in charge of the Reserve come to the village very rarely and the current president knows nothing about the institutional connections.

The former president returned on vacation this year and as some villagers remarked "His business is good now; he has truly made a profit from the project. He is building a modern house with bricks while we still live in these huts. He is very well off now and he has left us destitute. He used us to achieve his personal objectives; if we were to do it again we would not accept. This has done nothing but divide the population." The current village event is the technology that the former president has brought to the village: a Television, a DVD and VCR player, a generator that allows a village as remote as Dialamakhon without electricity to watch the national television and the play Peul and Mandinka music clips. His house has become the gathering point in the evenings of the entire village amazed by the modernity that is subject to jealousy and envy.

Gender Relations

Gender relations do not only imply power relations between men and women; but also between the women themselves these power relations are noticeable. Some women who have tried to develop control mechanisms and sanctions due to a bad financial management were excluded and marginalized. One woman who is the account inspector of the women's association had wanted to set up a system of control for the money available in the register; she was refused and at the same time was excluded from the association and the activities of market gardening; and in addition she no longer benefits

from the food supplies and the seeds that are distributed by the WFD. The fact that the women's associations are used as a homogeneous group with no differentiations does not allow seeing the power relations among women in the line of caste, class, ethnicity, and political party affiliations.

Lots of other women were excluded or excluded themselves because of discrimination in the distribution of the food supplies or because the market gardening activities did not bring them anything. According to the women leaders, in order to benefit from the food supplies or the seeds, you must be active in both the maintenance of the shared orchard (watering, weeding), in the market gardening, and in the anti forest fire activities. Even if women cannot participate in the activities due to a surcharge of domestic work, she will not benefit from the food supplies and seeds. In reality, the market gardening is an activity proposed by the WFD that does not correspond to the immediate needs of the women and it does not bring in much revenue, nor does it contribute to the enrichment of their diet. Therefore the objectives of fighting against poverty and of securing food are not achieved.

Duplication of Women's Leadership and Favoritism of the Leader's Wives

It is the same women that occupy the positions of responsibility within the associations and the reserve production committees. The women are not elected by their peers but co-opted by the male leaders who are their parents, husbands, or friends. It is the same on the side of the men, because the people responsible for the CIVGD and the village production committees are the village chiefs, the religious chiefs, the traditional doctors, and the politicians that already occupy positions of responsibility within the community.

The wives of VMCs leaders hold a position of authority over other women; and generally they are the ones that handle the finances. In the family of the First President of CIVGD we found the following people: His mother who is considered to be a Women's Village Elder who is in charge of the money from the market gardening and regulates the distribution of the food supplies and seeds, even though she did not occupy any position of authority in the VMCs. A head of a family emphasizes, "It is because she is the mother of the president that she is given the privilege of collecting the money". The president's wife is the treasurer of the VMCs, and her aunt is responsible for the agricultural commission. The current reserve president is his uncle. One of the wives of the current president and her brother as well are the account inspectors; and their little brother is the financial administrator of the women's millet-grinder that was given by the WFD.

Women are missing from the decision making process

Men occupy the key positions and women comply with secondary roles that they are given. Often the positions given to women are only on paper because during the meetings, we discover that that these women do not even know that they are supposed to assume certain positions in the VMCs; and others refer to the positions held in their

women's association. These fictional positions are often created to satisfy the donors requirements on gender issues; but in reality the women's functions are only theoretical and they have no say in the decision making process. Ribot (...) states the village chiefs in Sahelian countries are not necessarily representative of or accountable to the populations over whom they preside. He explains how the official processes in Senegal systematically under represents or excludes women and how the chiefs hold their position for life. VMCs have become forums for men's matters instead of serving all citizens; women are under represented and have no decision-making power. Privileges and power given to traditional authorities inhibit women's participation and representation as actors.

Political Impact: Rivalry between the associations and the political parties

During the process of the reserve creation that started in 1998 two years after the ratification of decentralization laws and three years before the presidential and legislative elections there was no major problems between the populations about the Reserve management. But after the local elections in 2001 which coincided with the first change of political regime in Senegal in 40 years, the oppositions and political tendencies created a social division. The first president of the CIVGD who was an advisor to the previous government in power for ten years was politically beaten in the voting office of his village by an advisor for the party newly in power, Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS).

After the local elections, the CIVGD president excluded everyone who was not in his political party; certain people were no longer called to meetings; and when the food supplies and seeds arrived they were not given any. This situation almost led to open conflicts. The responsible for the village's youth association emphasizes that they are subjectively excluded from the reserve activities and from the financial returns, and materials because of the politics. The reserve is helpful to one political party and a minority of families.

The political problems have destabilized VMCs. All of the members of the VMCs are Socialist, the political party of the CIVGD President. The political rivalries between the president who was an advisor to the previous government in power and the new advisor from the PDS in power since the change in 2001 had repercussions in the reserve committee and the women's association.

The first women's association called *Bamtare* (*development* in Peul) was created 30 years ago; it is the only one to participate in the reserve activities and to benefit from all the financial returns and materials. This association also supports the CIVGD president and his political party – the Socialist Party. Because of the discrimination and the exclusion of certain women from the VMCs activities, the association *Bamtare* that had more than 50 participants, lost more than a half of its members. These women who were excluded and unhappy created another association, now there was more than one association in the village. The new association *Balal Alal* (*God's Help* in Peul) started in 2004, two years after the official start of the reserve. It is supporting the village PDS advisor who is the political rival of the CIVGD president.

Therefore, women are trapped into the men's political game. Husbands dictate the political and social affiliations to their wives. One woman confessed "I am not a member of the association *Bamtare* who is affiliated to the reserve because my husband did not want me to participate. He asked me to participate in the new women's association that is affiliated with the PDS. I have no regrets because I am proud to follow my husband's orders. Without my husband's authorization I do not participate in any political or association activities". A head of a family reinforced "Here, according to our traditions, wives blindly follow their husbands".

The men also make the political decisions concerning women. Traditionally the husband is the sponsor for loans and credits to women. In the village of Dialamakhan if a husband does not sponsor his wife, the women's association will not grant her any credit. Example of that pregnant woman who solicited a loan from the association *Bamtare*: Her peers asked her to come back with her husband for him to be her referee (or guarantor). He refused as he considered this matter to be women's business. Finally the women decided to loan her the money with the guaranty from her husband, and in order to pay her debt she was obliged to sell one of her cows.

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