

**SOCIAL DIVERSITY, INTERVENTION AND COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES;  
MOSSI VILLAGES AND LAND MANAGEMENT (BURKINA FASO)**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The main issue of this paper is to disentangle the component "community" with respect to common property regimes, with a slight reference to Boulding's "comedy of the community" versus Hardin's "tragedy of the commons". This paper reflects in a preliminary way part of a larger research programme on the management of silvo-pastoral space in Burkina Faso (West Africa), in this case among the Mossi of the Central Plateau.*

*Collective action pertinent to common property resources is strongly hampered by social diversity at the local level and power-based antagonisms. Interventions for the sake of a better management of the natural resources cannot circumvent these local tensions; on the contrary, many times an intervention evokes dormant social divisions and strengthens internal competition around benefits in the common pool.*

*"Responsabilisation" of the local people, as it is fashionably called in francophone countries, is no guarantee at all for an improved management of common pool resources, nor through so-called traditional/endogenous arrangements, nor via externally induced alternatives. The failure is rooted in a basic misconception about community with all its implications like reciprocity, solidarity, communalism.*

# **SOCIAL DIVERSITY, INTERVENTION AND COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES; MOSSI VILLAGES AND LAND MANAGEMENT (BURKINA FASO)**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the field of common property resource management, the Oakerson framework has been used time and again as a conceptual instrument for analyzing comprehensively the technical-physical base in a community and the management structure of the natural resource under study (e.g. Oakerson, 1992). Among the four attributes distinguished in this framework are decision-making arrangements, where the rules structuring individual and collective choices are studied. These rules are defined by authority relationships that specify who decides what in relation to whom (Oakerson, 1992:46).

Behind these decision-making arrangements lies the social structure and the wider institutional environment that do not figure prominently in Oakerson's framework. What is the socio-political and institutional background of organization and rules that govern individual and collective choices among users? What are the socially and politically structured conditions for the possible coordination of behaviour towards (communal) natural resources, particularly under circumstances of relative scarcity and the threat of degradation?

These questions are the tasks I set myself, studying resource management in Mossi villages on the Central Plateau of Burkina Faso<sup>11</sup>. This is not to say that I conceptualize village society as the juxtaposition of on the one hand an atomized mass of rational, self-interested individuals, against on the other hand an organized whole based on solidarity, reciprocity and communalism. I would like to argue that research on communal resource management has to go beyond these stereotypes of village organization and its implications for modelling individual and collective choices. In trying to discover the roots for the general absence of common property arrangements in the villages under study, I decided to analyze in greater detail the basic characteristics and the dynamics of the local community structures, both in its traditional, "customary" appearance and its public realm, and with the interactions on the interface of local communities and the intervening parties, in short the social infrastructure. Decision-making arrangements, in this case not leading to sustainable management, are embedded in historically grown social configurations of a community and the dynamics of its relationship with the outside world.

## **THE DYNAMICS OF LAND USE AND LAND MANAGEMENT**

The Central Plateau of Burkina Faso is a transition zone between the soudano and the sahelian climate. It has two main seasons: the wet season between May/June and October and the dry season from November to March. The rainfall, 500-1000 mm, in the wet season is erratic, which leads to highly variable yields over the years, and can dramatically vary from village to village. Temperatures are high so that organic material decomposes rapidly.

The two major activities are agriculture (crop cultivation) and animal husbandry. Crop cultivation being the main activity of the Mossi population, and animal husbandry in the form of agro-pastoralism of the Fulani. The landscape characteristics are those of the savannah. Most of the Mossi region is a plateau,  $\pm$  300 m high, intersected by a great

number of smaller and greater valleys (*bas fonds*). The soils are relatively shallow and of low fertility; most soils have a bad structure and are erosion-prone. The system of agriculture is that of shifting cultivation, but with a high and growing population density ever more fields are taken into permanent cultivation, thus incurring all the risks of depletion. The agricultural production system depends on grain: sorghum, especially in *de bas fonds*, millet, often with an intercropping of beans (niebe), around the house some maize, and some minor crops (peanuts, tobacco).

Animal husbandry depends on cattle, on small ruminants, and poultry, all of which is always individual or family property. Cattle is an ethnic specialisation of the Fulani, although nowadays some Mossi are getting involved in cattle rearing; most cattle possessed by (Mossi) agriculturalists, however, is entrusted to Fulani herders. For their subsistence these Fulani depend on crop cultivation as well. The small ruminants are herded by children during the rainy season, in order to protect standing crops in the field from damages by the animals. During the dry season they forage freely and make use of the crop residues in the agricultural fields after the harvest.

In many Mossi villages the natural resources are over-exploited. The population density is high and probably still increasing. Fallow periods for the recovery of vegetation and soil quality are being shortened, many fields are cultivated on a more or less permanent basis without adequate fertilisation, resulting in the reduction of the vegetation, decreasing soil fertility and erosion. Although the level of exploitation and the degree of success fluctuate enormously in time and space because of the irregularity and unpredictability of the rainfall, the general tendency is one of gradually falling crop and animal yields. Particularly in the more northern zones of the Mossi plateau the dependence on animal husbandry by the agriculturalists tends to increase. In a recent study of three villages around Kaya, the capital of the Province of Yatenga, it was found that among the Mossi exploitations 85% got their major revenue from animal husbandry (Barning et al., 1994).

In general one could say that the overall exploitation pressure on the natural resources is high in the Mossi villages and still not come to an end, in spite of a considerable degree of outmigration. One of the consequences of these dynamics of man-environment interactions is that the former system of symbiosis between agriculturalists and pastoralists is gradually being replaced by a relationship of competition. Agriculture advances at the cost of former grazing grounds. As the saying in Mossi land goes: the pastures of today are the farm fields of tomorrow.

The rules for the use of the natural resources are different for agricultural crop land than for grazing lands. Use rights for cultivation are given to families and can not be alienated. Every inhabitant, in principle including new immigrants as well, holds this fundamental right: the right of access to land to support his family. Anybody, including "strangers" accepted by the local community, have cultivating rights, even under conditions of relative land scarcity. So are Fulani considered "strangers", who have settled in Mossi villages and received gifts of land, are rather gifts of use rights. The land can not be reclaimed by the earth priest (see further), let alone by the village chief. He is not the owner, but the custodian; the land is managed as common property. When the land is not cultivated, it can be left fallow or lent out to others, mostly fellow villagers (never rented). Today there is hardly any bush (*brousse*) that is not divided among families. Options for the extension of agricultural fields are over. "*La brousse est finie*", space is saturated, so that further development can only take place through

intensification of agriculture, in the sense of Boserup's model of increasing frequency of cropping. Another response is a greater pressure on land. There are indications that the rights of access to land for cultivation is becoming less guaranteed for the Fulani and that these rights sometimes are even contested by the Mossi. Probably also borrowing arrangements are in the process of change. The lending out of land for indefinite periods is becoming rare, which in some cases did actually check the influx of new settlers (for a case study see de Zeeuw, in press).

The rules for grazing are different. Outside the growing season, both cultivator and herder benefit from a different set of property rights. Anybody can graze his animals anywhere, except on fields that are under crops. Because of the primacy of cultivation rights and the gradual expansion of agriculture reaching its final limits in most Mossi villages, pastoralism is under high pressure, leading to sharply reduced sources of forage. As even very marginal lands for cultivation are in a process of occupation, access to land is dramatically diminishing for herders. Also in the valleys of the villages the herders lost a great deal of grazing pasture, since these lands have been gradually cleared by agriculturalists and prepared for the cultivation of crops. The management of the fallow changes as well. Formerly, even a few years ago, most crop residues were left on the fields, and anybody could make use of it. Nowadays as a rule the stalks of sorghum and millet are harvested by the farmers themselves, to stock them for their own animals and for other uses, e.g. compost pits or cooking fuel. Thus not only the fallow period shortens, but also the post-harvest produce in the fields is being appropriated by the cultivators. These tendencies can be seen as a process of privatization of resources that in principle were of a common property nature, probably as a response to new conditions of relative scarcity.

In other cases the encroachment of agriculture proceeds in such an intensive way that the Fulani - notwithstanding their mostly peripheral settlement in the village territory - can hardly move their cattle to their grazing areas or watering points, encircled as they are in the process of agricultural colonization. Cattle tracks, also when they are officially recognized and even when clearly marked, are invaded by crop fields. Pastoral zones, established in places, are not respected. It is evident that as a result frictions and conflicts between Mossi and Fulani are increasing on the Central Plateau.

In general it can be stated that both the productive functions for pastoralists and the protective functions of the silvo-pastoral areas (including fallow fields) are in danger, particularly now that these rangelands increasingly serve to maintain the productivity of crop lands, e.g. by collecting stones from sloping rangelands for soil and water conservation measures on cropfields, cutting of grasses to be fed as fodder or used as mulch or in compost pits (Kessler et al., 1992). At the same time it is evident that under the conditions of growing scarcity limitations arise in the use of natural resources by village inhabitants, leading to forms of near-exclusion of some groups within the village. Nevertheless there are no indications that these dynamics lead to the manifestation of new communal land management initiatives at the local level.

The village territory is the centre of local production. Nevertheless are the village boundaries in many respects open boundaries. Grazing is done over the village borders in search of pastures and watering points, just as is done for the collection of fuel-wood<sup>2)</sup>, and the collection of construction wood and other bush products (fruits, medicinal material, etc.). Also the cultivation of agricultural fields is not restricted to the local village territory and can be done in neighbouring villages. Marchal (1983:341)

found in his village (province of Yatenga) a percentage of 5%. One of the villages in my research area, the province of Sanmatenga, counts 60% of its cultivated area beyond its borders. Also people from very different origin may make use of the existing natural resources in a village territory. E.g. cattle from transhumant livestock holders tracking from North Burkina Faso to southern areas in the dry season, or cattle traders. Also wood collectors from the cities or commercial charcoal producers -authorized officially with a cutting permit from the forest service or not- do exploit the non-cultivated lands for wood from unprotected species, e.g. for the provisioning of Ouagadougou, as far as 60 miles from this capital. Officially declared State domain, these territories are neither village land, nor common property. Since the Forestry Code, operative since the thirties, a de jure State domain status has been imposed on a number of valuable tree species, including *Acacia Albida* (already protected before), both on cultivated and on non-cultivated land, with the management authority vested and centralized in the forestry service. This imposition, although without a high degree of control, probably strengthened the conditions for over-exploitation of the unprotected woodstock as open-access resources. The State of Burkina Faso claims ownership of common property resources declaring that unutilized and uncultivated land belongs to the State. This State assumption of administrative rights to common property resources has resulted in a free-for-all type of resource use.

It is in view of this perspective of increasing and large-scale environmental degradation and the growing frictions between cultivators and herders (pastoralists) that the call for a better management of the village territory comes to the fore, in francophone countries known as the debate on "*gestion de terroir villageois*" or simply "*gestion de terroir*". This concept born in Burkina Faso on the occasion of the land reform (*Reorganisation Agraire et Foncière*, or RAF) and decided upon by the Burkinabe revolution in 1985 and later to be transformed into the approach "*gestion de terroir*" aims among other objectives at a greater and firmer "*responsabilisation*" of the village populations, leading to better and collective control systems in the local communities for managing their own natural environment (e.g. see Painter, 1993).

"*Responsabilisation*" contains two messages. The first is to make the villagers aware of the problem of over-exploitation and degradation, and the need for sustainable management, which incidentally the local inhabitants mostly understand more fully than many an outsider according to my village informants. The second meaning is to promote and develop a local basis for collectively solving common problems in land use management, whereby the rural community as a an entity has to take responsibility in a democratic way for the better management of the renewable natural resources in their territories, with the technical and financial assistance by the government (Barbier, 1991).

## THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF MOSSI VILLAGES

The basic distinction in Mossi villages is the one between the "people of the power" and the "people of the land". This division goes back to the fifteenth-sixteenth century when the Volta basin of present Burkina Faso was invaded by horsemen from the south who imposed their sovereignty on the sedentary agricultural populations of the region. Thus emerged a number of kingdoms of the Mossi lasting until they were incorporated in the French protectorate in 1895/6 (Izard, 1985).

In the course of time, the Mossi kingdoms created a form of centralized government, organized according to specific principles of power ("*naam*"). At the village level this power is delegated to the chief ("*naaba*"). In the local community, his authority is as it were counterbalanced by the power of the earth priest ("*tengsoba*"). The earth priest is born from the most ancient family of the native population. The Mossi invaders and conquerors took only part of the land and left the land control regime to the native population and particularly to the magico-mythical forces that emerge from it.

The juxtaposition and conjunction of these two segmentations underlies primarily the maintenance of the social, political and religious order. Mossi conquerors and rulers and the vanquished native agricultural populations amalgamated in what is now known as the Mossi society.

Burkina Faso, Upper Volta until 1983, became independent in 1960 and till today this basic dichotomy between the "people of the power" (*nakombse*; sing. *nakomboga*) and the "people of the land" (*tengbiise*; sing. *tengbiiga*) is still crucial. Putting exceptions aside, the village chief is a *nakomboga*<sup>3</sup>. The descendants of the original rulers attach great value to power, to "*naam*". In Mossi society values like individual initiative, autonomy, equity and democracy are subsidiary to the search for power, structured in a strictly hierarchical political order. As part of a kingdom, Mossi villages are not to be perceived as isolated and more or less autonomous political entities. The Mossi kingdoms have been enormously expansive, and the Mossi under modern circumstances are still expanding their sphere of influence, a.o. in the new lands of the southern immigrant areas of the country ("*les terres neuves*").

The power structure is not to be seen as a settled constellation. By way of illustration I picture two situations. The king sends his princes, politically threatening around his throne, to the villages to let them take the place of present village chiefs, originally descendants of the royal dynasty. Such a substitution can not be resisted, and creates its own tensions. For two groups of village leaders are frustrated; one shunted from their vested village power, the other expelled from the centre of power to an insignificant village. Competing and often frustrated power groups provide no fertile ground for village solidarity. But also internal village constellations can evoke frictions. For when there exists a long tradition of power in one family line of *nakombse* in a village, evidently there are a large number of noble families who progressively have been discarded from the village power. Although *nakombse* and former nobility, they have become ordinary village people, "*talse*", in nothing distinguishable from the rest of the population (sometimes they try their luck elsewhere in other villages; see Luning, 1989). In this way, the pursuit of power, inherent to the Mossi institution of political authority, creates its own frustrations and its own barriers for economic and institutional development. It explains some of the experiences (and frustrations) of many a development worker on the Central Plateau of Burkina Faso: the ceaseless games of power in Mossi villages, at times latent then again open, and sometimes unexpectedly exploding under the impact of an external development intervention.

The native cultivators are kept at bay from the political power; that is the exclusive domain of the "people of the power". The "people of the land" are responsible for their territory, the "*tempelem*". Centuries ago the *tengbiise* (the people of the land) have cleared the virgin lands and in the process "humanized" the bush (brousse, "*weogo*"). The representative of this group, the *tengsoba* (plur. *tengsobanamba*) i.e. the earth priest (*chef de terre*) is responsible for the rituals in the territory, such as the sacrifices for the ancestors. He is the prominent religious leader and the crucial mediator between

earth and heaven, between the living and the ancestors. The *tempelem* shows a diversity of landscapes, from agricultural fields and valleys to hills and eroded plains. No man's land does not exist, each piece of land has its "owner", or rather its priest and custodian.

In this context, the concept of village territory is a difficult concept. For the Mossi, it is the whole of family exploitations of all those who are under the authority of the village chief. If you ask for the bush ("*weogo*"), the farmers show you their *tempelem*, that is the territory under the ritual headship of the *tengsoba*, the custodian of the land. *Tempelem* is the only territorial notion among the Mossi. The *tengsoba* has his territory, and the *naaba* (village chief) has his subjects. The territory of a village is the collection of a number of adjacent *tempelem*; there can be more than one in a village.

As mentioned before, power is the dominating drive of the village elites. The organisation of the economy (improvement of the living conditions of the village population, improvement of agriculture, management of natural resources) is no part of their domain of interference. The obsession of a chief is to rule and impede others to rule. Even when in modern times, especially with the invasion of development organisations after the first great droughts in the early seventies, village chiefs became involved in the world of interventions, they showed only a limited capacity of economic mobilisation of the local population. Most of these chiefs view this mobilisation for economic purposes as a sheer token of their power or at least as a means for its legitimization. Neither in terms of the authority of the *tengsoba* nor in those of the power of the *naaba* you could hardly speak of the organisation of land management. There is no collective institutional structure for the sustainability of the natural resources, let alone for its enrichment. By definition, the village headman does not intervene in these affairs, while the tasks of the *tengsoba* are primarily of a ritual nature and he intervenes in the settlement of customary land conflicts.

As was mentioned above, the Fulani constitute an important group in the use of the natural resources, although they are not to be found in all Mossi villages. Ethnically different and mainly oriented towards animal husbandry, they are not part of the Mossi village society and as a minority, live a literally and symbolically marginal position in the periphery of the village territories. Although already sedentarized since many generations and living in permanent camps, they are not considered as "real" inhabitants by the Mossi population. It is characteristic that in our preliminary surveys of some villages through the village chiefs and their assistants the Fulani were practically always overlooked. Also in village-wide meetings, the Fulani make default (mostly they are hardly informed) and it is very exceptional to see them represented in village committees and the like. Although there are personal and often very cordial relations between Mossi and Fulani families, as a group they are excluded, and perceived as "strangers" since they are not associated to the traditional Mossi authority and live their own way of life. The traditional authorities of the *nakombse* in the Mossi villages are directly and very hierarchically linked to the structure of the Mossi kingdoms. They derive their authority not from their "constituency" but from the centre. The Fulani have their own socio-political structure, and more in particular according to kinship lines of authority. The local settlement (camp) of Fulani in a Mossi village is called *wuro* (plur. *gure*) which forms part of a lineage, then a clan and eventually a tribe. But the lines of authority from clan to *wuro* (camp) are very much looser than those of the Mossi hierarchy. A *wuro* is mostly small in size and independent. This independence of Fulani domestic units is connected to the need for mobility of their cattle.

It is very questionable whether the village in itself is the significant social unit for the local Mossi population, and a fortiori for the Fulani. Each Mossi village consists of several quarters, sometimes more than ten, territorially divided and often at considerable distances from each other. Generally, each quarter is dominated by one lineage group and identified with a specific socio-professional status. Sociologically speaking, solidarity is to be found at the level of the quarter rather than the village, which is more a political entity and in modern times an administrative unit. Where quarters for instance quarrel about the appointment or the succession of a village chief -not uncommon in Mossi society as we have seen- all collective enterprises at the village level can be automatically paralysed.

The development organizations in the region are in constant negotiation with some villages that do not succeed in benefitting by the activities proposed, because of power struggles or inter-ethnic problems in the village. Also the "*groupement villageois*", sometimes the most influential grouping in a village, is not able to resolve these sorts of conflict in a village.<sup>4)</sup>

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL ORGANISATION

Local government means local powers elected or appointed and their administration, that is the personnel who is authorized to take decisions in development matters and who is accountable towards the local population. In that sense it does not exist in Burkina Faso. The first interface of the population with the State is the district (*département*), covering a great number of villages. But even the level of the district has little practical meaning for the local people. In practice, it is the province and not the district that has the moral personality and its own budget. One does not exaggerate when saying that the province is the lowest decentralized public echelon for the rural population.

Each village has an administrative delegate (*délégué administratif*), appointed by the head of the district (*préfet*) and actually his assistant at the local level: messages, orders, control.. etc. In terms of government as defined above, the Mossi villages are without budget, without power, without personnel. During a short period in the history of independent Burkina Faso, namely the revolutionary regime in the eighties, the villages were fully represented by the institution of the *Comité de Défense de la Révolution*, later re-baptised as *Conseil Révolutionnaire de village*, elected by the villagers, and consisting of the delegate of the village and the representatives of the young, the elder, the women and the farmers. These CR's were liquidated in 1991 and have in fact not done much for the solution of the problem of local government in the sense of representation and democratic processes, even not in terms of a reservoir of experiences in new institutional forms.<sup>5)</sup>

In the meantime, however, a broad scope of functional relationships between village and the outside world came into being. Probably the most prominent one is the *Groupement Villageois* (GV), at the time started by the Regional Development Authority (*Organisme Régional de Développement* or ORD, later on *Centre Régional de Promotion Agro-pastoral* or CRPA). Also other government departments try to organize their networks in the villages, and a great number of local structures have been created by non-governmental organizations, seeking legitimate channels for intervention and a local platform for participation. To all this one can add the recent creation of local commit-



tees for landuse management, the *Comité Villageoise de Gestion de Terroir*, based on the new landreform legislation, here and there set up in a few villages but hardly functioning yet.

This is not the place to elaborate on the history of the GV, a sort of pre-cooperative. Local organisations and in particular the GV know already a certain continuity in a great number of villages and are supported by the local population with more or less enthusiasm. They certainly do not represent all segments of the village society, nor do they appear as democratic bodies or function democratically, e.g. with respect to the rotation of the leaders. Intervening agencies like NGO's are looking for local partners for their specific activities and actions, mostly far more valued than the strengthening of the local capacity for self-governance.

On the Central Plateau where no important cashcrops are grown, the situation is different from the more southern regions of the country where cotton is an extremely important industrial crop. In these southern regions, the GV's play more often their role as an extension of the central government -for whom this source of revenue is crucial- rather than their role as representation of the local community (Jacob et al., 1992). They carry out the directives of the State bureaucracy. In theory, the GV's on the Mossi Plateau are under a lighter custody of the State and have room for manoeuvre to develop a basis for new institutional developments. In actual practice, the greater part of local organisations including the GV's are moribund, others react merely on interventions from State, development projects or NGO's and adapt to the priorities of these external agencies. As is said in French: an attitude of "assistencialism". Intervening parties are searching for what is called "dynamic villages", even ranking local communities according to this yardstick of dynamism, meaning primarily those villages that in the eyes of the development organisation responded favourably on earlier external incentives and initiatives. Independent local initiatives are rare, especially since the boom of international donor aid after the first great Sahel droughts. This external domain is from the villager's point of view chaotic, uncoordinated and rapidly changing over time. The "logical" response to this uncertainty and unpredictability has been an attitude of basic opportunism, not the least in the sphere of organisational and institutional adaptations (Lekanne dit Deprez, 1993). Nowadays the prestige of a village leader is very much measured according to his adroitness in attracting outside donors for all sorts of activities in his community.

When an NGO for instance asks for a special sort of local organisation as a vehicle for its intervention, the local community will do its best to comply with this requirement to show its goodwill and hoping to get all sorts of "manna" in return. The local organisations are primarily intended to fill the gap between the state or donor and the village population. Local organisations in Mossi villages are rather derivatives of the public service, their last chain, than authentic community structures. In principle, local organisations in individual villages can be a vehicle for associative efforts with others to resolve problems of economic and social development. But this is very difficult under conditions like those on the Mossi plateau where all sorts of benefits are offered by a multitude of intervening parties, sometimes contributing more to disorganisation than to association at the local level.

The local networks legitimize the interventions of the various agencies, but do not replace the need for the articulation of the local interests. The external parties make an appeal to the population for participation, but hardly encourage local government.

This lack of local government respectively of representative organisations are a severe handicap for the initiation of institutional experiments in the domain of natural resource management. The few attempts towards de establishment of a *Comité Villageoise de Gestion de Terroir* (CVGT) are disappointing and reflect the paucity of local organisational capacity to handle collective affairs (though not the only problem with these committees).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It was Kenneth E. Boulding (1977) who in his unequalled style denounced the metaphoric and thus treacherous character of Hardin's tragedy of the commons by introducing the metaphor of the comedy of community. "What, then, is the answer of if is not property, primogeniture, and class? The only other answer to the tragedy of the commons is the comedy of community", he said (p.286), being well aware that we have to be particularly careful of this metaphor as well.

There are numerous authors and experts in the Sahel who are convinced that the local community should be the basic institution for the management of the natural resources (e.g. Faye, 1990). Reasons given are that at the village level a maximum of information and local knowledge is available; that the villagers benefit most of the natural resources; that the very users have to take responsibility because they are the most qualified and the most involved.

Villages are by definition social organisations in itself and contain at the same time different forms of social organisation. But one could easily exaggerate the organisationness of local communities when confronted with the necessity of collective action towards problems of a common nature. In the situation of the Mossi plateau of Burkina Faso referred to in this paper, with the interference of the State in local property arrangements one can only very partly speak of communal lands. Most land use takes place under actually open-access conditions where neither local or external users nor the State can sufficiently control the access and utilization of the natural resources, let alone their sustainability.

But suppose the State would refrain from its ownership of common property resources - which is actually nowhere the case in the Sahelian countries -, could it then be expected that the Mossi villages would (re-)institute communal land management arrangements in which members would submit to regulations according to Hardin's solution of "mutual coercion mutually agreed upon"?

As we have seen with the gradual process of exclusion of Fulani herders by Mossi agriculturalists and the tendencies towards privatization, the likelihood of a solution of this common pool problem has decreased rather than increased where these two groups are in bitter competition with each other. It is hard to perceive how common interest between Mossi and Fulani could be created as a fertile ground for communal use and for sustainability arrangements on the basis of village institutions.<sup>61</sup>

A second conclusion may be that the Mossi society - even without taking the Fulani or other outsiders into account - are plagued by internal political tensions and antagonisms. The struggle for power is endemic in Mossi society, and seemingly dormant villages may explode with the tiniest intervention from outside.

Further, the extent of control formerly and nowadays exercised by local authorities (chef de village, chef de terre) over community resources is very limited. Moreover, the traditional control concerns the question of equity of access to resources (assuring households the access to land in communally held territory), and it is questionable at the least whether this control of access can create its own adaptations under conditions of relative resource scarcity and increased competition over limited and often degrading natural resources. No tendencies towards collective responses and (re-)organization were detected to emerge as sustainability problems became serious on the Central Plateau. Collective arrangements are further hampered by the conceptual problems of defining a Mossi village as a clear-cut territorial unit.

I agree with McCay & Acheson (1987) and their concern about the tendency of critics of Hardin's thesis to assume that "community" - which does not figure in Hardin's model - implies solidarity, homogeneity and collective action. No communities without cleavages and conflicts. But what I have tried to show is the development of competition between different social groups and the declining adequacy of these developments for the sustainable management of natural resources. In other cases, a sharpening socio-economic stratification in a local society can jeopardize development interventions in the field of common natural resource management. For a project in Morocco, Venema (1993) has shown how influential and rich cattle holders appropriated most of the benefits of a local cattle association on common grazing lands and left the destocking -one of the major objectives of the project- to the poor herders of the society. What is said for range management in Africa in general (Lawry et al., 1984), is all the more true for the Central Plateau in Burkina Faso: though traditional institutions may under certain circumstances retain sufficient legitimacy to play a role in natural resource management, the economic and political base for traditional authority is becoming increasingly tenuous in this area. Some form of communal tenure has to continue, but new or renewed modalities of common group management have to be designed.

#### **NOTES**

1. The author participates in a multidisciplinary research programme of the Wageningen Agricultural University, the Netherlands, on "Utilization and management of silvo-pastoral areas in the Sahel", in close cooperation with the University of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

2. This paper does not explicitly deal with management problematics of wood and water, although essential for human wellbeing as well as for crop and animal production. For an excellent study of the institutional dynamics of common property arrangements with woodstock in one of the Sahelian countries, viz. Niger, see Thomson et al., 1992.

3. This a general interpretation. Local or regional configurations may vary. Imbs (1987) found in a region north-west of Ouagadougou that a considerable number of villages were headed by "a man of the land" or by a lower rank of the "people of the power", since long become ordinary village people.

4. For the sake of brevity, I have to restrict my analysis to this rough simplification of the enormous heterogeneity of the socio-political structure of the average Mossi village (e.g. Imbs, 1987; Izard, 1985; Marschal, 1983). In this paper, however, some of the key aspects of the Mossi village organisation, important for the understanding the complexities for communal land management arrangements, are considered.

5. Wade (1988) emphasizes the need for authority, always problematic on such organizations of common interest. "Democratic" principles are no guarantee for good and sustainable management. For reasons of legitimacy, the domination of the existing local elite is imperative. One reason is the substantial private interest in assuring that the communal arrangement is provided. In Mossi villages this does not seem the case. Another difference might be that Mossi village leaders in general have no tradition of using their authority for the defense of all the different parties in collective resource management.

6. Institutional arrangements are also responses to earlier experiences in common resource management. Unfortunately, in the Sahelian countries these attempts have failed as a rule. Thus the recent experiments in the management of communal village woodlots, initiated by the forest service in all Sahelian countries, have been ineffective because of severe technical deficiencies and the complete lack of any coherent management regime (e.g. Lekanne dit Deprez, 1989; also Thomson, 1992). The peasants perceive these experiments as the concern of the State, and not their own affair. There are researchers who consider also the Forestry Code a serious impediment for genuine local experiments in community management modalities (e.g. Lawry, 1988).

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