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Decentralisation and civil society : negotiating local development in West Africa

1 Abstract and introduction

The paper, referring to fieldwork i.a. in Senegal, challenges the concept of decentralisation by regarding the interface of knowledge systems constituting social spaces at the local rural arena. It is asked whether there is a process of marginalisation of knowledge which had been acquired and generated these last years by peasant organisations and women's movements after the breakdown of the authoritarian development State. Applying an agency and gender perspective, it is asked how decentralisation is conceived of by various kinds of local and especially female actors – including the elected rural councillors – as access to development information from which they are again excluded and therefore obliged to renegotiate. On the other side, their conceptions and experiences of sustainable development including social and food security are devaluated and not made use of in newly designed blueprints of local development plans which are said to be elaborated by participatory procedures, thereby challenging good governance through interaction with other levels. There is a process of reducing pluralism of initiatives through increasing unfertile competition of different groups and insecure lines of authority and informalisation of self-organisation (e.g. regarding new forms of resource management). The international cooperation tries to formalize platforms and fora transcending community-limits in order to overcome the closed system approach.

2 Negotiating decentralisation at the interface

The paper, referring to own fieldwork in Senegal, Cameroon and Mali (as well as other research supervised) challenges the concept of decentralisation by regarding the interface of knowledge systems at the local rural arena (see Lachenmann 2004). It is asked whether there is a process of marginalisation of knowledge which had been acquired and generated these

last years by peasant organisations and women's movements after the breakdown of the authoritarian development state. Applying an agency and gender perspective, it is forwarded that decentralisation is conceived of by various types of local and especially female actors – including the elected rural councillors – as access to development information from which they are again excluded and therefore obliged to renegotiate.

On the other side, conceptions and experiences of social movements including peasant and women movements concerning sustainable development including social and food security as well as securisation of natural resources are devaluated and not made use of in newly designed blueprints of local development plans which are said to be elaborated by participatory procedures. These are falling back with regard to former experiences of integrating livelihoods and technical innovation of cash crop production, protecting natural resources within a broad conception of local economy, in favour of an outdated public policy approach of infrastructural planning. Thereby economic subsistence and market activities are being pushed aside which had been integrated at least to some degree by self help projects and movements pursued within a kind of solidarity co-operation of external NGOs and a networking and institutionalizing selfhelp movement generated in the Sahel and West Africa region after Sahelian droughts (Lachenmann 1993).

It can be argued that thereby good governance through interaction with other levels is jeopardized by looking at concepts of participation and local management of natural resources, as well as the risk of capturing by technocratic authority. Concepts such as social forestry make one ask about which community is being constructed concerning the devolution of power, thereby hiding and reinforcing external interests and patron-client relations towards higher levels of society. This type of devolution of planning power might lead on the one hand to turning NGOs into simple service providers, and on the other to constructing local communities as ignorant with public spaces, which had been created, risking to disappear. The challenge is to bring central and local logics of agency together by creating spaces and arena for negotiation and change, instead of formalistic participation.

We should ask how civil society, through the new structures of local authorities created within the framework of decentralisation, can continue or even enlarge its influence on local politics? Does this power devolution from the central state re-enforce, as a mutually fertilising process, the space and autonomy acquired by civil society in the sense of empowerment? Or is there a

capturing of the local population and neglecting of recent acquisitions? Decentralisation is (see Simon et al., eds., 1993; Thoni et al., eds., 2001) understood to be bottom down, comprising delegation and devolution of power, whereas empowerment would be bottom up, taking over power through agency. This would include power of definition (cultural - meanings, tradition etc.), regulatory power (political) as well as shaping power (social) – on the basis of new forms of popular modes of political action. The relationship between state and civil society can be looked at according to the deployment of creativity, visions and innovation.

Using an interpretative sociological approach in order to study social cohesion, an interactive, relational and dynamic perspective is crucial using the concept of the "interface" as introduced by Norman Long (1992) between different knowledge systems, logics of action and negotiation of meaning. It makes us pay attention especially to "encounters at the interface" and look at overlapping fields assuming that these are the crucial points where this new structuring of political, economic and social spheres can be understood. Thereby, collective political action and economic transformations are focussed in order to better understand complex and very diverse situations. An important point is to look from below at links to the political and policy system (vertical coherence) and to society in the sense of network society (social cohesion). Power relations are thereby operationalised in agency, authority, structuration and institutionalisation.

Thereby decentralisation can be studied as establishing the basis of good governance and overcoming typical structures of „bad governance“. At the same time, through agency, decentralisation should be studied to provide space for participation, local autonomy, democratic change and social justice. Civil society is not to be perceived as representatives of organisations, but as strengthening principles of public debate and creating multilevel arena, as interacting with the state and contributing to structuration of society / social cohesion. The political system, state administration and regulations are studied when interacting with civil society in different arenas.

Participatory approaches, followed in recent years by the development apparatus, risk to perpetuate the dichotomy of government–population in decentralisation. A populist approach might use simple conceptualisations in terms of opposed and uniform systems, referring to generalising abstractions, such as village, (traditional) community, or ‘the women’, thereby lacking methodological and social validity. Internal differences as well as relations and

interactions, and the negotiation capacity between different groups and levels of organisation or with the external system are not taken into account. These problems have come up because decentralisation and self help approaches failed to look at the social and political context.

NGOs are often seen to represent civil society and social science expertise thereby avoiding basic debates on different sector policies and crosscutting issues (such as food security, environment), and participation becomes a populist concept perpetuating the dichotomy government – population, excluding women especially when formal decentralised structures including "traditional" ones are introduced or 'reinvented'. There are changes of social, especially women's spaces, i.e. of the public sphere and the private, as well as new forms of organization on the local level, especially by women, and their translocal networking bridging various levels. Within the framework of the ongoing transformation processes (Lachenmann 2001) there are newly emerging gender differentiated forms of interaction (interfaces) with regard to decentralisation, all forms of associations (including peasant organizations and NGOs) and democratisation. Empirical research provides us with a rather ambivalent picture, according to which newly established female modes of organisation and 'traditional' forms of political/societal representation are hampered through the ongoing formalisation of local power structures. The limited democratisation efforts with regard to multiparty systems and formal decentralisation and local administration tend to exclude women.

3 Engendering decentralisation

Decentralisation at first glance looks like being favourable for women, but it might be that more informal spaces of negotiating gender relations when becoming more formalised will further discriminate against women and bring the unequal gender constructs of the state down to the basis. With regard to civil society, in the sense of making the state accountable, ascertaining social embeddedness of the market etc., it is generally recognized that women are much less involved in the entanglement between state and economy, i.e. in the predatory, patrimonial and authoritative state, distributing mechanisms of enrichment and constituting patron-client relations as current form of articulation also concerning development resources. However, in some cases women's projects are used as the last strategic resource of the late development state to get some money distributed. The call for good governance should look into these structuring mechanisms.

It seems important to pursue an institutional approach, engendering e.g. the social organisation of regimes such as use of natural resources, social networks, looking at the construction of gender in institutions. This means introducing an intermediate level of analysis between micro and macro which would be necessary to better understand issues of decentralisation in the sense of devolution of competence and resources, as well as of democratisation.

Gender relations are crosscutting relations. Often, access to land and to natural resources passes through relations of marriage and alliance which are translocal and going beyond territorialities. Women are not members of the re-constructed or 'invented' "traditional community". New forms of participation introduced by the state with support or pressure of the international donor community often do not take into account their old parallel power structure of representation, ignoring mechanisms which link female worlds and spaces with general power structures. Also, many other translocal relations are not taken into account, e.g. those constituted through migration processes and social movements becoming constituted in a translocal space and influencing local policies, or those linking big men to their economic privileges.

It has become clear that in most cases women and their activities are representing the local (knowledge) and the rural (grassroots), which therefore has been mostly neglected. When, the local gains interest during the process of decentralisation, new forms of 'systems of ignorance' seem to be constructed, marginalising knowledge and practice of social movements and especially of women whose organisational structures are less formal and who contribute a lot regarding voluntary work as well as collecting financial resources at the local level.

Experience shows that while it might be interesting for women not to be too much put into a straight jacket of male, communal and state control, it is a fact that groups or co-operatives with mainly male members tend to be formal(ised), whereas women's groups tend to be informal(ised). In Senegal e.g. men are mainly members in economic groups - GIE groupement à intérêt économique, women in Women in Development groups - GPF groupement de promotion féminine. The latter are captured by old experiences and culture of community development and home economics through established channels depending on Social Ministries subject to losing support after change of government. Also many local NGOs are very patronising in their "participatory" approach through which a lot of external finance passes.

A case in point is the example of three “women presidents” studied (by Franklin C. Odoemenam in 2004; Lehrforschung 2005; Lachenmann et al. 2006) in a Rural Community in Senegal in the framework of rehabilitation and expansion of rice schemes which, according to the gender order, are being worked on by women (now also admitting young men), thereby enhancing food security by taking away pressure on rainfed cereal production by men. Each of them was considering herself to legitimately represent “the women” whereas one was co-operating with her group with the programme of bilateral technical co-operation, the other with a NGO and the third one with state services of women’s promotion. In this context the management of these collective economic resources seemed not to be included in the local administration and development planning. Also the example shows that these women groups are not politically represented in the local council in order to recognize regulations agreed upon.

4 Constituting social cohesion and security

Since structural adjustment programmes SAP we have observed that community and especially women's resources, which are invested in embedding economic activities, are siphoned off by formalisation of social security, cost recovery etc.. Already a lot of fund raising has taken place on the local level, in traditional or 'neo-traditional' forms. Yet it has been mostly women who collect this money and who do the so-called voluntary or self-help work for providing basic services. Therefore the cost recovery as well as formalisation of basic services provision through local government becomes problematic. Questions of subsidisation between levels of service provision seem not to be discussed. On the contrary, in Senegal it has been observed in 2004 how a rural community was taught how to make a health centre viable by increasing fees without even discussing problems of access, nor how to formalise employment of female local midwives.

Livelihoods are constructed through systems of social, including gender relations (Lachenmann 1997). Social security is constituted through systems of gifts and distribution, in permanent change (often uphold with a lot of effort by women). The local economy is characterised by a 'subsistence logic', with women taking as a priority and perspective livelihoods including household energy, water, including special orientation towards natural resources, such as collecting wood and other gathering products. These resources are now subject to new regulations at the decentralised level and a certain blockade as to bringing

them from the social to the public level takes place. The associative sector has proven itself to be the most relevant actor achieving social cohesion through institutionalising concepts of self help, food security, social security (Steinwachs 2002) etc. within a de-territorialised, translocal space which is also structured through gender relations. Social and gender differences become more and more evident with, e.g., certain women acting as development brokers. Often women are very innovative in finding new forms of interaction with the local authorities and administration (e.g. different types of self-help forms of waste management in Mali), but the general problem to be exacerbated by decentralisation, of voluntary work and self help or professionalisation as well as access to knowledge, concerns mostly men. It has become clear that food security constitutes an important link between the political and economic field, which needs institutionalisation of social entitlements. At the same time it is necessary to look how modes of socio-economic transformation can be enhanced within these spaces through actors of civil society as soon as a meaningful co-operation takes place within decentralisation. Caring or community economy and services as a gendered structure are organised very often through social movements and groups and at present get into conflict with new bureaucratic forms of resource mobilisation and budgeting in the frame of decentralisation.

The associative sector has clearly shown to be the actor of a translocal space where gender relations become more visible. There are gender differences as to certain women do act as development brokers and the problems linked to voluntary work or professionalisation, as well as access to knowledge which used to mainly concern men, now also concern women. As especially the case of Senegal has shown where there are very strong women involved in the peasant movement with traditional authority so to speak, but also women of the younger generation, whose formal education does not go very far. For them, the number of informal trainings received within the NGO world seems not to find enough recognition, neither regarding internal careers within the peasant movements. They provide them neither with the possibility to enter local politics in an executive role, nor within the new formal structure of agricultural producers cooperating with the State on extension, at least not at the higher levels. The only arena which still seems open for these female actors seems to be a sort of middle level professionalisation within the associative sector, such as Association pour la Promotion de la Femme Sénégalaise (APROFES) including agriculture and economic literacy, para-legal counselling, mutual health insurance as well as saving and credit associations (Sieveking 2007).

After the near to break down of technical services in Senegal, depending on national Ministries, in many places local, so-called self-help groups or development committees had installed a kind of local administration, as e.g. peasant organisations in Senegal water supply etc. Especially with regard to gender policies, local and regional technical services (such as agricultural extension) have never been functional but reducing women to community development, animation etc.

The institutionalisation of informal or traditional rotating credit systems, of land rights, social entitlements and social security in general does not take into account these gendered differences and knowledge (accumulated through experience). E.g. in Senegal anti-salinification and rehabilitation measures of rice fields have taken into account that rice fields are generally under female authority, labour and knowledge. But the organisation does not receive official recognition as to local development plans and authorities (implying ability to apply for funds and get advice and services). It constructs women as 'being helped by men', working always collectively, providing automatically land to their sons (or husbands). The changes in land tenure and its gendered structure are never officially addressed, women often get land only as a group without formal recognition and institutionalisation of property rights.

As to local communities, women are recognized as community managers but as soon as local services (water supply, grain mills etc.) are formalized or monetarised (such as wood, gathering products) it is not taken into account where the finance should come from (e.g. for labour saving devices, health services) as husbands see it as a women's affair. At the same time it is not taken into account that already a lot of money rising especially by women takes place for (informal) social organisation (neighbourhood, health services, food and care for sick family members).

The knowledge channels between (informal) social (female) spaces and formal politics are dwindling, rendering women and their perspectives less influential in (local) politics. Regarding participatory planning methods, monitoring and evaluation, community building, and revival of traditional institutions, the community is always conceived implicitly as male, and women are specially added as one group. Female knowledge is mostly considered to be particularist as against general knowledge, and women in organisations (including local governance, committees, NGOs etc.) are supposed only to be able to contribute (and entitled

to speak), if at all at this formal organisational and political level, to issues such as health, food processing etc., not regarding economic issues, infrastructure etc. although their outlook is very much oriented towards livelihoods in general.

Agricultural research and extension, as well as development policy in general, have failed to take into account local knowledge and practice, as well as the everyday world which largely influences processes of learning and appropriating knowledge and adapting it to circumstances. The field of translocal knowledge transfer and structuration is neglected (Mueller 2005) and only individual 'households' or 'farming systems' looked at as carriers. An absolute gender-blindness prevails in so far as women are still not considered as agricultural producers. In Northern Ghana e.g. (Padmanabhan 2004), in the agricultural research and extension service, it is not known what kinds of innovations are adopted in reality, as women have to work partly for men when innovations for cash crops are being introduced. In certain circumstances, however, they introduce innovations on their own fields, thereby being able to enlarge their room for manoeuvre and sometimes enter market production. There is a female line of learning, i.e. transmitting information and knowledge and creating possibilities of practice (in relation to new seeds, e.g.). In countries where peasant organisations are entering agricultural extension, there might be a chance of slow change of the system, however formal institutional regulations will have to change accordingly.

5 Democratisation in local government and the state

Democratisation processes on the one hand, and decentralisation on the other, do not share information, or make procedures transparent. Rather, they mystify and complicate regulations more and more, so that, for instance, in rural communities in Senegal, although counsellors have been elected, members feel increasingly helpless and dependent on information and interpretation of rules from above. Processes involving state bureaucracy and the ruling party take precedence over local autonomy and initiatives, preventing creative learning processes (Lachenmann 2005). By the same token, the successes, although certainly not always sustainable, of several decades of activities of the peasant movement, including women's groups, are not built on and their experiences and knowledge tends to be marginalised instead of being developed.

The training programmes for elected councillors and peasant leaders on supposedly culturally adequate organisational development (held in the local language and based on African proverbs) showed the devaluation of these experiences and knowledge, as well as inadequate contents of training which are hardly contextualised. Many of these leaders had been trained in self-organised workshops with NGO support many years ago; what they would have needed to know was how to deal with authorities in the framework of decentralisation regulation. Also, the year-long literacy efforts of the peasant organisation were forgotten in new programmes sponsored by Unesco. Mainly men are trained as there are very few women who are elected. In the communities studied in 2004, the up to 4 female councillors (out of more than 30) were extremely bitter when they said that men were not passing on “information” to women, a very important resource for them. None of them was a member of a ‘hard core’ commission, such as finance, land, environment etc. Furthermore peasant leaders who become members see themselves as representing development knowledge which is supposed not to be represented in “the texts”. Decentralisation is mainly seen as passing authoritarian knowledge to the “grassroots” who are constructed as ignorant.

My thesis is that the present processes going on on behalf of decentralisation and strengthening of local government might mean that local structures and institutions are broken up and captured from above. This especially will take place on the back of the women, as they formerly had certain possibilities of co-decision making or even autonomous fields which might have been limited but were socially regulated. In formal so called democratic elections women are not integrated in a more or less equitable way, because the old pattern still is valid with women's influence passing through a kind of representation system. It is clear that they have problems to get on party lists. This means that democratic elections for communal bodies are crowding out women with regard to their say in communal affairs.

On the local level, the WID Women in Development approach is very simplistic. In Senegal ‘the women’ of a community were constructed as an undifferentiated category and by authority made responsible for managing the special gift which the government had “given to the women” in the course of decentralization, a “case-foyer”, a nice looking, Arab architecture inspired building, mostly not in operation. This is a clear expression of the state's symbolic capturing of any female civil society, in continuation of the former capturing within the one-party system (as women’s wing) as well as the supervision and control through one technical Ministry (of Women affairs etc., formerly community development etc.). It might be possible that this has been exacerbated – in a counterproductive way – through the process of

preparing the Beijing Women's Conference and the so-called post-Beijing process, including the elaboration of National Action Plans. In 1997, I was able to observe that for the Women's Fortnight the festivities were used to applaud the President from the longstanding socialist party (overruled in the meantime). It had been explicitly put under the slogan "Women and Decentralization". But it was very clear that the central state tried to re-capture their associative structures and by strengthening the decentralization process mobilise women for the regime. In the provincial town studied, the female president of the peasant organisation at the national level was jointly organising one of these public events / rallies together with the Women's Affairs Minister and regional Governor (see Diop 1995; Kaag 1999). So, the state is capturing in a very clear way – in general through foreign aid – the local development process by a socio-technocratic Women in Development WID approach. The continuity of the process has been observed as practices by the new liberal government (research in 2004; Sieveking 2004 and 2005; Lehrforschung 2005). Also, the latest national report on gender policy is of a very low professional and activist quality, not applying a gender approach to general policies (Rép. du Sénégal, 2005).

One could formulate the hypothesis that the state is at present re-enforcing its hold over the population and augments its legitimacy through WID, exactly at a point in time when decentralisation produces a certain formalisation and homogenisation of the women's movement, a process running contrary to pluralism and diversity intrinsic in the idea of civil society and, in principle, also of decentralisation.

Good governance can be qualified as overcoming these structures when establishing links between the political and the societal sphere, accountability, re-allocation of resources and social justice. At the same time, it should mean overcoming the technocratic problem, i.e. prevent the return of blueprints – such as community / district development plans, without taking into account processes, analysing the real situation instead of static shopping lists – in favour of green house (Hyden, 1990) /diversity approach. In Senegal, anyhow, there is lack of coherence between the development plans recently elaborated by Rural Councils and those classically meant to be established by higher echelons of administration. In our study in 2004 (Lachenmann et al. 2006) we have been looking into processes of their elaboration observing a kind of technocratic overtake especially through local promoters (no women), whose function is not officially foreseen, being trained by a donor supported programme in order to

do surveys as well as funding applications – meant to take place in form of personal consultancy (instead of coming out of civil society or the councillors themselves).

In Senegal, the new decentralisation regulations and practice concern mainly land issues and are linked to natural resource management, as well as some infrastructure development, such as markets, including health and education. A critical issue of general importance, brought about by women's movements on the national level, is the question whether women can own and inherit (agricultural) land. Collective access of women's groups to land and new economic opportunities often seem to be the solution, sometimes it can be negotiated, however formal attribution seems not to take place.

By the natural resource management project studied, as well as by other country wide projects called "literacy for rural councillors", mainly men are trained – as it is a fact that there are very few women elected. In one Commune, the four women counsellors (out of more than 30) were extremely bitter as to saying that men were hindering women to become politically involved. None of them was member of a "hard core" commission, such as finance, environment, land etc. One of them was the former (first) President of the CR, coming from a noble family, one was an elderly woman from a village associated with her, one was the secretary of the Sous-Préfecture (administration), and one was "representing" the young women (i.e. rather following the old status concept). In another Community a woman councillor stepped out when her brother was supposed to become a member. Some women councillors become vice presidents of health or finance commissions; in general they are seen as representing (only) women's matters (Lehrforschung 2005).

The number of women who are knowledgeable about decentralisation and regionalisation modalities seems indeed very low. Therefore one can fear that women, who are so active in grassroots groups, can not continue to maintain their influence in present transformations as soon as the local regime is institutionalised, and they lose their spaces of public debate – constitutive elements of civil society.

6 Construction of community and closure

Decentralisation is based on participatory development rhetoric, and the question is whether it implies the mobilisation of "civil society" as strategic resource coming to substitute itself when the state is retreating (René Otayek, in Point Sud 2002, p. 14) and at the same token

being captured by the state. We have to question how do (former / present) approaches to participatory development connect with the concept of decentralisation. Participatory rural appraisal PRA and other planning methodologies have always been deficient with regard to reflections on social and democratic legitimacy (apart from methodological validity). On the other hand, within the framework of formal political representation, participation of civil society is often considered undemocratic. It is certainly clear, that there is a contradiction between the concept of participation regarding planning and projects as applied in development and new forms of political participation in newly established elected bodies, but they often do come from a social movement i.e. civil society background.

A typical case of constructing a closed unit as 'community' from above is that of 'social forestry' introduced according to recent development concepts, in many forestry legislations. According to its intrinsic logic, this approach conceives of self management of forest resources through the population, contrary to state forests and reserves, including a share of revenues from the private sector. However, in most cases, authoritarian and predatory practices do not change. Contrary to translocal social and economic realities, these participatory approaches are constructing an idealised locality to which this local management idea is linked. These approaches necessarily lead to economic and political frustrations by not taking into consideration institutionalised modes of interaction and links with higher levels whose power positions cannot be addressed. Community tends to be constructed within the decentralisation framework, also by donors and even by translocal movements, in an essentialist way, not taking into account the translocal relations. Examples of development co-operation are social forestry in Cameroon, as well as other cases of neo-traditional institutions distributing / regulating access to economic resources and community development, and co-ordination units for natural resource management in Senegal, including so called local conventions and group management of rehabilitated rice fields.

The question is, what concept of community is used, who belongs, who does not. How are gender specific forms of resource use represented, is there dependence on big men, from their lineage, family of origin, their husband. The concept of actors used, how is it defined, what idea of 'representatives of villages' is used, how are the local self-help groups defined with whom the co-operation is planned. There is high danger that a pseudo-traditional structure is institutionalised and used for a new, modern type of regulation (i.e. land right based on community forestry), excluding women from decision making and from seriously taking part

in new economic opportunities, although women groups are involved in certain tree planting efforts on individual (of family) or group (women's and farmers') farms. Thereby, so-called traditional or culture specific gender relations are perpetuated in new societal structures and regarding new political and economic opportunities, not according to an autonomous social change which might include the negotiation of a new gender order, but with foreign donor assistance. The local is constructed in a mono-gendered but contradictory way. On the one side the community has a male connotation, on the other side, as has been mentioned, in policy contexts, women and their projects represent 'the local'. Small activities are for women, new economic opportunities of some importance are for men, but often making use of 'traditional' structures. Autochtony starts to become a big problem (Geschiere, Meyer 1999), possibly enhanced by decentralisation and community approaches, e.g. excluding so called strangers from access to land, as well as struggles over historical land rights coming up. The question is "to whom belongs the forest" (Ngo Youmba 2006 on Cameroon).

In local councils in Senegal, there is a more differentiated power structure (see also Blundo 1996) with, however, "politique politicienne" becoming very virulent with mainly women denouncing this, as they are less involved. The everyday work of the local government is astonishingly often run by a clique of 'friends' of the president (research by Bertrand Zohy in 2004; Lehrforschung 2005; Projet de recherche d'étudiant(e)s 2006), who either are the administrative secretary and his friends, but also who are selected amongst or given honorary positions of e.g. president of youth club etc. This has been especially observed in the – relatively rare case of a young president with quite some schooling, who, as he himself explained, become president by "converting" to the new party in power.

7 Bringing 'development' in through civil society at knowledge interfaces

In some countries it is officially required for local government to incorporate "grass roots organisations" in deliberations and in service delivery. This means, with regard to social legitimacy, but mainly with regard to professional quality control, there must be higher level organisational and associative structures in which actors on the local level are integrated (as referred to in the case of Senegal). Then, there should be platforms, fora etc. on negotiation, but they have to crosscut different levels and to be part and parcel of the public sphere. The local level is too low ...

On the other side, some activists of the Senegalese peasant movement think that decentralisation leads to a certain undesirable politicisation, undesirable in the sense of not being oriented towards development but towards group interests. However, in our recent study (in 2004) we saw that a former peasant leader, after becoming councillor and “representing development” in the meantime had advanced to vice-president of the Rural Community. This position seems indeed to provide him with some space for change.

A decisive problem to be followed is how to attract attention to and create knowledge on local problems at the meso and national level. Food security is a crosscutting field where knowledge and concepts are completely different between actors. Up to this date, and although this needs the most decentralised approach possible (overcoming central mismanagement, mis-information, mal-distribution, speculation etc.) the state representative has always hegemonic knowledge. The ‘peasant leader’ community’s concept of food security goes against the official one, with their own cereal banks having broken down however in most cases. The food security paradigm seems to have been subsided by the poverty paradigm (see Sénégal 2002 for Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, also Schaefer 2002) and – as a cross cutting issue – seems not to be addressed by Rural Councils, but regarded as NGO’s business, as are the cereal mills often run by women groups and decisive for subsistence work and caring economy.

The decentralisation processes could be expected to produce more both way information flows, including on processes of impoverishment. The local – state relationship is regarded by the rural population as being mainly a matter of knowledge, of information about the different possibilities and services offered by the state and international co-operation. This means that communes are mainly seen as points of getting information as well as access to public resources, and not of acquiring power regarding good governance, accountability, introducing alternative development concepts etc. It can therefore be regarded as a top down transfer of hegemonic state information, and not as the constitution of a space where the knowledge needed for agency is produced. This would integrate different logics – local knowledge as regards everyday practice, technical or situated knowledge, as well as (new) expert knowledge of a more generalised character. Within the framework of peasant organisations, through their leaders acting as brokers, the population had become quite knowledgeable in grasping these messages, but this direct link will become more difficult when localised.

Technical services, authorities and regional regimes do not seem in any West African country to be undergoing yet a serious reform process in order to be able to actively interact with the new local partners. As to economic / technical know how and competence, delegitimisation of technical services has taken place for some time, but now official rules of supervision, line etc. are often not yet clear, i.e. there is no devolution of power. There is certainly a legal pluralism and hardly any knowledge about the new solutions to be found and existing regulations which might overlap and become redundant.

For following the regulations of local government and especially in order to have access to development resources, the communities need to have expert or professional knowledge – apart from the specialised knowledge on legal and administrative regulations and procedures. They do not have this knowledge. It is implied that they have to buy it (sic!), from consultants - private consultants or NGOs (they are said to be able to compete). There is no knowledge chain yet clearly established with regard to technical knowledge from state agencies.

As regards the technical know-how, in the Senegalese case, it has become clear that the communal level is certainly overwhelmed and professional services are necessary. One talks about “partnership” with the state services, as well as contracts regarding financial contribution of rural communes. This would be the institutionalisation which might be necessary, given the fear that the entities of co-ordination created crosscutting the official structure of decentralisation and regionalisation, might not be legalised by the higher levels of authority. On the other side, up to now it seems the bottom down financial flows do not yet occur and the dependence on donor money becomes higher and higher. The other side is the mobilisation having taken place in an informal manner as mentioned above and risking to be siphoned off to higher level formal systems e.g. of social security systems, water schemes etc..

This means that there are processes of closure; communes become closed systems, without transparency regarding individual actors being able to influence the local arena. We have to look not only at different levels but especially at translocal relations, knowledge exchange, negotiations and interpretations regarding what means decentralisation, including e.g. through different emigrants residing abroad. The question is whether movements and NGOs, given their loss of competence, are still able to be brokers of local and expert knowledge; can projects and externally funded programmes create the necessary arena for negotiation? Civil

society forces had been initiating a debate on sustainable development, but who gives new creative inputs in local councils which define themselves to be regulatory, infrastructure instead of development policy orientated. Peasant organisations have already established necessary frameworks such as in Senegal Comité de Concertation des Ruraux CNCR which has now been involved in institutionalised forms of multilateral cooperation in a rather complicated, very slowly advancing para-public system of counselling of “producers”, in order to work with and represent their organisations (ANCAR ed. 2004).

It seems clear that the rural civil society is the only force which could seriously bring up these issues. The outcome is not yet clear at all, especially as the peasant movement has to a large extent lost its capacity of structuration on the middle level. Anyhow, it seems that with decentralisation it will be more difficult to negotiate concepts of development. It seems that NGOs will be more and more distanced from their origin of social movement, representing doubtful expert / local knowledge, following developmentalist codes including decentralisation jargon, and thereby lack any degree of autonomy of vision. Here I am thinking of the a.m. committees of Rural Councils, and the fact that (in Mali) communes are supposed to make use of consultancy firms and NGOs in order to be able to handle the new local knowledge. This will certainly influence the local structures of power and authority which are based on legitimacy of knowledge, i.e. their knowledge will be delegitimized.

What would be needed as an integral part of the decentralisation approach to foresee mechanisms and arena on or crosscutting different levels. These levels would not necessarily have to be defined as bureaucratic, authoritarian ones. On the long run, these fora could become established as civil society or third sector institutions. All three different actors should be considered – village population with their self help organisations, rural communities as new democratic institutions, as well as state authority including services and regulations (e.g. forestry codes etc.). Thereby the condition of institutionalisation at higher levels than the local would be met and a contribution made regarding structuration between state, society and rural community through negotiation of knowledge. What should be strengthened is the capacity to negotiate as regards different groups within, as well as with the surrounding systems. Decentralisation is based on the concept of territoriality. Communities might be re-constructed as traditional and harmonious, in what can be called cultural and social closure. In times of de-territorialisation, trans-nationalism, global / local relations the

focus in the form of approaches of place (Harcourt, Escobar 2002) locality, glocalisation could be helpful.

Regarding gender, the issue of higher level institutions – not in the hierarchical sense, but networking on multiple levels - is addressed as a challenge to develop institutions which will constitute a bridge between hierarchical state structures and civil society. However, the experiences with state and party controlled women umbrella organizations still looms high. And is gender only brought in as an afterthought? Are all concepts which have recently been introduced with regard to agency and societal structure – such as good governance, civil society, accountability – overruled by structuralist and legalist systems which bring back what Hyden (1990) called “blueprints” in the form of development plans. Will there be a transfer of hegemonic knowledge top down and preclude new social spaces which had been constituted by social movements, providing space for change (Long 1992) and creativity and shaping power? Would new formalist democratic structures hinder the transformation of the authoritarian state? A two way approach is certainly needed with a public sphere, multilayered, enabling critical debate and exchange of knowledge, including the professional and research community.

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