Donors and Recipients

a critical analysis of development in Burkina Faso

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-a critical analysis of development in Burkina Faso.

Contents

Preface

This report is the result of a generous grant that my supervisor Henrik Secher-Marcussen suggested that I apply for in 1995 at the SEREIN Research Programme, financed by the Council for Development Research in Denmark. After working for two years on a UNDP project trying to implement a national plan for the sustainable use of natural resources in Guinea-Bissau, I felt a strongly motivated to get involved into research on why things kept going wrong. This provided an excellent opportunity.

Many people have supported me in what turned out to be a "tremendous challenge" to use a development euphemism. In particular, my SEREIN colleagues at RUC, Henrik Secher-Marcussen and Christian Lund, have been extremely supportive. Henrik has followed my work at close range (or as close as I would let him), and has been very accessible and suggestive. He has equally been remarkably understanding when deadlines were not met, advice not followed etc. I hope he does not regret this now that the product is finished. Christian has likewise been extremely helpful in a very encouraging way, for apparently no other reason than genuine interest in what I was doing and colleagial spirit.

In Burkina Faso I would especially like to thank Saada Barry from Dori who proved to be the ideal interpreter and discussion partner during my Seno fieldwork. His remarkable understanding of where I wanted to get to was quite astonishing. Equally, Yolande Lingani proved a serious and skilful partner in Boulgou Province, and diligently undertook a difficult village survey in my absence during the hottest months of 1997.

I also owe thanks to the all the people of IDS at RUC, the environment in building 5.1. was in fact very inspiring, something that I have only learned to appreciate fully now that I have left it. At my new office at the Centre for Development Research, I have been given the ideal circumstances to finish the dissertation. In this respect, Steen Folke has been especially supportive and understanding.

Finally I would like to express my thanks to my parents for their ardent support in taking care of our children, especially during the long afternoons at the office. Kasper and Peter are the enthusiastic witnesses and proof of what an excellent job they have done.

The *sine qua non* of the whole affair is, of course, Kristine. In a sense it is ridiculous to say "without you, I would never have made it", because I would not even have started, everything would probably have been a terrible mess.

MALI

NIGER

200

100

0

km

Gorom Gorom

Dori

Djibo

Ouahigouya

Kaya

To Niamey

Fada N'gourma

Tenkodogo

Koudougou

Ouagadougou

Pô

BENIN

TOGO

GHANA

Bobo-D.

Gaoua

To Abidjan

IVORY COAST

N

Burkina Faso

— · — Regional boundaries

⊙ Capital city

● Other towns

+++ Railways

——— Main roads
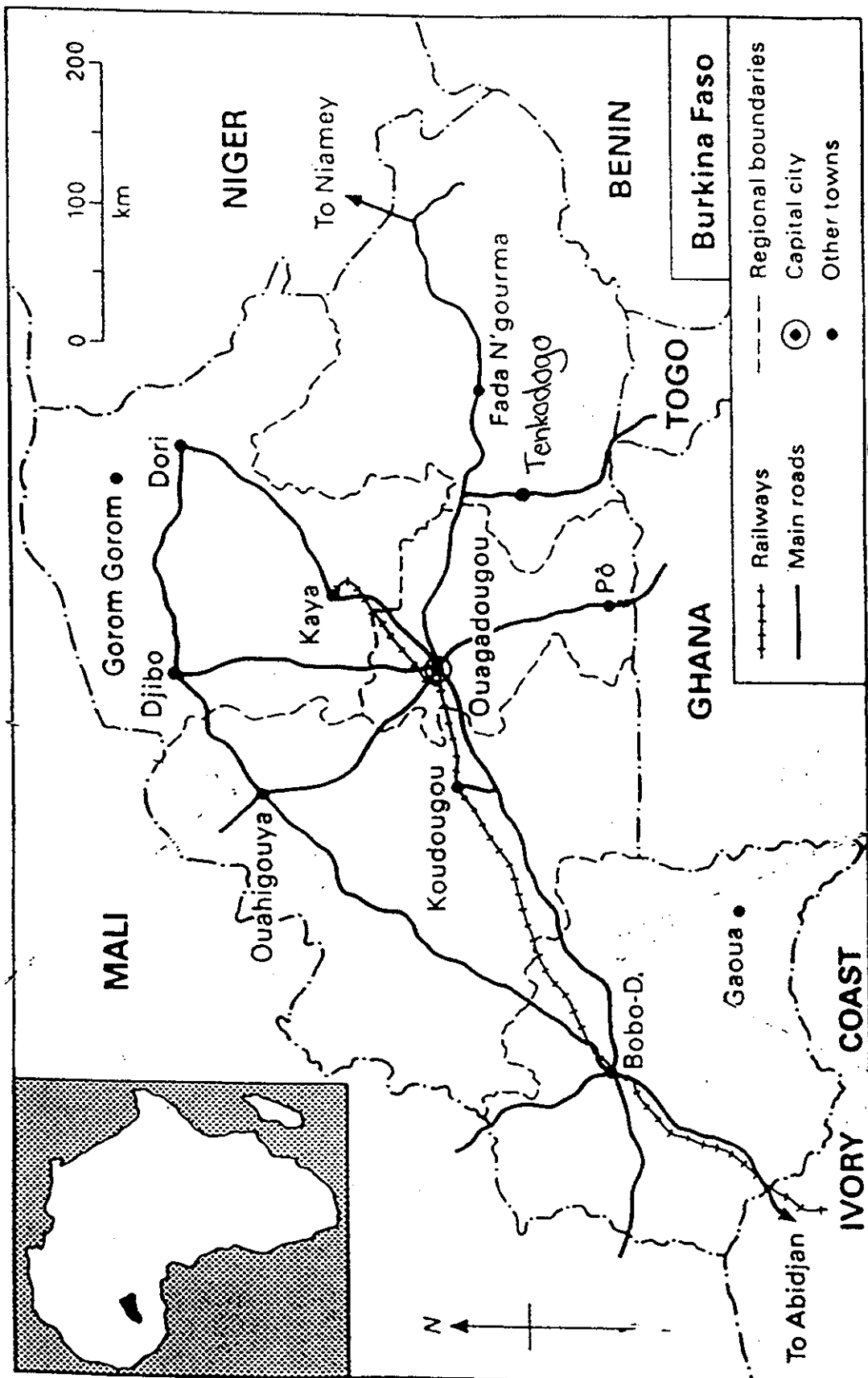
Based on the map p. 6 in Sharp, Robin: Burki-
na Faso, New Life to Sahel, Oxfam, 1990

Introduction

In the cool reception hall of the Hotel Independence, the favourite hangout in Ouagadougou for development consultants, researchers and the like, I once ran into a fellow countryman. He agreeably presented himself as a professor in bio-chemistry, heading an ENRECA-research support programme running in Burkina Faso and Ghana. The research centred around fermentation processes in *soumbala,* the seeds of the *Parkia Biglobosa* -tree, traditionally used as a taste enhancer in sauces, a common and widespread, but economically rather insignificant plant. Rather bluntly I asked him what was so interesting about *soumbala,* knowing only too well the economic implications of running an ENRECA-programme. He explained that the *soumbala* was threatened by the imported MAGGI-cube, and that support to the *soumbala* was therefore desirable: As this was a local product, it would be better for Burkina Faso's *development.*

I have no reason to doubt the scientific quality of the research of this ENRECA-programme, nor do I have the qualifications to do so. What I find interesting is that in Burkina Faso, rather esoteric research into the fermentation processes of rather insignificant plants is justified by referring to the country's development.

This dissertation delves into what this development in Burkina Faso is about. I prefer writing development without the citation marks that many anthropologists (Ferguson 1990, Gould 1997) use to distance themselves from the concept. This is not because I feel particularly comfortable with this very normative and in many ways highly problematic concept, but it is because refraining from the quotation forces the writer to make up his mind how he defines development. Development in Burkina Faso is strangely omnipresent. It is even mixed up in the fermentation processes of *soumbala.*

As I will try to show in the following chapters, development is an important business, and it is an issue which triggers off competition, positioning and conflict over the political, economic and symbolic resources which are at stake. Many of the struggles and failures of development, I shall argue, stem from the fact that there are conflicting interpretations of what this special kind of social transformation means. It is, thus, a very serious and important political issue in a country like Burkina Faso, which merits sociological and anthropological attention. As I will try to show in the coming chapters, development is *the* single most important dynamic of a specific modernity which is produced.

Anthropologists have always been a little scared of and arrogant towards the development apparatus. This can be explained in terms of a reasonable wariness towards development projects and other forms of intervention, where anthropologists, with an often much more profound knowledge of Sahelian societies, have been able to foresee that local customs or power relations would constitute major obstacles to the anticipated running of the development projects. Certain anthropologists have, however, equally been critical towards development, as this has been seen as a type of modernity, which would not be good for the "beneficiary groups". This type of attitude can be divided into two categories. First, certain anthropologists "take sides" in

conflicts over development, for instance, when local people's rights and access to their resources are threatened by development intervention. Second, the anthropologist sometimes sees the development process as perilous to the culture, lifestyle and production system of the group of people he/she has grown to sympathize with. The latter approach is however likely to resemble conservationists' views; there is a risk that the anthropologist sees for instance certain ethnic groups or cultures as "endangered species" threatened by development.

It is, therefore, very fortunate that increased interest in development as a research domain for anthropologists and sociologists has emerged in recent years. The problem with this kind of research is that if it becomes instrumental, if it turns into "applied research", the anthropologist/sociologist becomes the team member on the development project appraisal mission, tackling the "human dimension", assuring that the engineer's development solution becomes applicable, finding the "cultural constraints", and providing tips as to how these can be overcome.

Olivier de Sardan (1995) proposes a fundamentally methodological definition of development, allowing certain research paths, and not limiting ourselves to normative trajectories of asking whether this or that social change is development, underdevelopment, unequal development, development from above, below, within, or whether there is an unfortunate absence of development. Development must be seen as "a series of social processes induced through external actors or institutions, but by mobilizing the society being developed and by forging external and local resources, techniques and knowledge" (Olivier de Sardan 1995, my translation). This definition permits an analysis of development as a form of social change largely initiated from the outside, social transformations based upon foreign finance, ideology and knowledge, a salient feature of Sahelian countries like Burkina Faso where development aid makes up an alarming percentage of the countries' economies.

Development institutions, as central mechanisms for resource allocation, become central arenas of conflict over the very considerable means that are at stake, often for purposes that are not the vital priorities of the social actors involved. What Olivier de Sardan terms "the socio-anthropology of development and social change" is, therefore, specifically concerned with the analysis of the interactions of different social actors coming from different cultures (Culture seen as a construction which is constantly subject to relentless syncretisms and symbolic struggles). This non-normative definition of development allows us to see development first and foremost as an object of study.

This socio-anthropology is understood by Olivier de Sardan as "l'étude empirique, multi-dimensionelle de groupes sociaux contemporains et de leurs interactions, dans une perspective diachronique, et combinant l'analyse des pratiques et celle des représentations". (Olivier de Sardan 1995, p. 10) It thus differentiates itself from a quantitative sociology and essayistic and speculative anthropology, emphasizing *in situ* empirical research. And the reason why development projects are such appropriate objects of study is that the encounter of the different social logics which constitute a rather complex social phenomenon, often ignored by decision makers, is presented to the researcher in a coherent form within such projects.

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Contesting development

There is a strange paradox inherent in the way development intervention in the form of aid is performed in Africa. The mad Kurtz, lost in the Heart of Darkness of the Congolese jungle, had, despite his madness and megalomania, "beguiled beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations", seen the difficulties of the uneven nature of the historically developed relationship between the white and the black proclaiming that "we whites must necessarily appear to them in the nature of supernatural beings- we approach them with the might as of a deity" (Conrad 1983 (1902)). The fact that he said this in order to legitimize atrocious behaviour is another matter.

Marcel Mauss, in his seminal study of gifts some 25 years later, was equally aware of the devastating power of the rich intruder stating that "charity wounds him who receives, and our whole moral effort is directed towards suppressing the unconscious harmful patronage of the rich almoner" (Mauss 1967 (first ed. 1925), p. 63). Even nowadays, anthropologists describe how the rapacity of international business has led Africans to fear the cannibalistic inclinations of the whites by virtue of their gluttonous appetite for meat and their mastery of the technology of blood transfusion, suggesting that Europeans wield supernatural and dangerous powers (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1993 p. xxiv). All examples of the extreme unevenness characterizing the European/African interface.

Within current development discourse, this unevenness is commonly overlooked, and developers are often surprisingly oblivious to the way their interventions are subject to what they consider to be misinterpretations. Development assistance is based on "partnership", adopting "participatory approaches" in order for the beneficiaries to obtain "self-reliance". Old modes of domination based on reciprocity, exchanges of gifts and women etc. are ignored and replaced with "development", and even condescendingly and scornfully looked upon as obsolete rudiments of an era that ought to be put behind us. (World Bank 1989)

From Africa we therefore hear accounts of development resembling the "cargo cults" of Melanesia, where local populations in Africa practice rites such as "popular participation" or "forming women's groups" or "planting trees" (Langley 1983; Laurent & Mathieu 1994) in order to attract development from the whites. This is an illustration of the distance between donor and target groups and of the discrepancy between development rhetoric and practice.

Developing Burkina Faso

In Denmark, Burkina Faso epitomizes the African "developing country". Strange name, low ranking in all development indexes, on the fringe of the desert, landlocked, small, poor (Danida 1997b). At the same time, it has a reputation among people that at least know a little bit about the African continent as a country "devoted to its development". The Sankara experience, the many NGOs, the facility with which foreign development cooperation works in the country, the name of the country ("The land of the upright men"), the democratization which the political system has undergone[1]. Being poor, peaceful and without the spectacular tourist attractions of the East

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[1]   This dissertation is not an analysis of the democratization process in Burkina Faso. I cannot help, however, expressing a certain amazement concerning the acceptance by the donor community, especially of the president Compaoré and his often strange mode of

African countries, development has become the trademark of Burkina Faso, the grand political (but at the same time de-politicised) issue. The construction of a special development discourse is essential in understanding this.

When trying to assess the impact of these development processes, we are confronted with an initial paradox. There is a contradictory tendency towards *simultaneous exaggeration and underestimation of the importance of external interventions* in rural Africa.

Exaggeration because rural societies are often, implicitly or explicitly, seen as societies that are unable to introduce the necessary changes, given their demographic, political and economic development, changes which are beyond the influence of the actors involved. There is a tendency to see the societies as static, so any changes occurring are attributed to the development intervention. Donors see themselves as prime movers in these social changes, providing the necessary technology and capital to break the vicious circles. A surprising belief in the possibility of engendering development through planned intervention; a teleological faith in social engineering as a feasible social project.

On the other hand there is a counter-tendency to *underestimate* the local political implications involved when economically very powerful, logistically-huge and employment-generating development projects move in. The fact that the development project immediately becomes a political arena for struggles over scarce resources, struggles that, in certain cases, become much more important than the objectives of the project themselves, is widely overlooked (Danida 1997a; 1997c).

It was this simultaneous exaggeration and underestimation which fascinated me during the years I lived in West Africa before going to Burkina Faso. On the one hand, a tremendous interest in development being "participatory" and "sustainable" and, on the other hand, a remarkable disinterest in the fierce struggles that went on over access to allowances, cars and all *"les à côtés qui font le développement"*, which affected all the development projects that I have ever known of. Problems everybody within the development business were very well aware of but, at the same time, saw no way of avoiding. At the same time, the "side effects" of aid seemed to me to be under-researched, nobody seemed particularly interested in the influence of the mere presence of the aid apparatus in Sahelian societies, despite the fact that the majority of the cars in the capital had a project tag onto them and a favourite investment object seemed to be luxury housing for expatriates.

Burkina Faso and Ouagadougou are no exception in this respect: the weight of the development "machine" as Ferguson calls it (1990), seems enormous. It is hard to imagine how many jobs are created to assure the leisurely life and consumption patterns of the expatriate community (and the Burkinan elites working within the development apparatus, who probably have the highest-paid jobs in the country, along with high-ranking jobs in the mining sector). Restaurants and hotels host seemingly endless numbers of consultants preparing reports and plans and attending a never-ending series of conferences on development issues: "Pan-African Conference for the Implementation of the International Desertification Convention", "National Conference for Bush-fire Fighting", "Conference on the Role of Decentralization in the Process of Democratization".

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democratization which we have witnessed since his violent takeover of power in 1987.

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Etc. etc. Every night on TV, the news consists of accounts of these conferences the camera panning across the bored spectators, so after a short time you start to recognize the same people every week.[2]

Development is always seen as the solution to the problems of Burkina Faso, never the cause. At the same time, development is seen as distinct from politics, the latter being associated with the dirty business of power and embezzlements, whereas development apparently is seen as a conflict-rinsed type of modernity, where "improved living conditions" are of the highest priority. I have been assured on several occasions by interviewees that "We are a development association, not a political association", but I have not always felt comfortable with those reassurances.

Constructing Burkina Faso as a developing country

Countries, especially developing ones, are often framed within a special discourse. It is often interesting to look at how these societies are described in portrayals: Lesotho totally surrounded by South Africa (Ferguson 1990) , Egyptians cramped together along the Nile (Mitchell 1995), Burkina Faso landlocked on the fringe of the advancing desert, but struggling with its development. As a consequence, the problem is viewed within a national context and the nation state is visioned as a coherent entity, which it often is not. And solutions to address the problems diagnosed are also located within a national planning framework.

Development within these frameworks is never seen as the disease, always the cure, and it has a remarkable ability to forgive its own mistakes and prescribe a reinvention of itself as the remedy. Within "sustainable development" the victim is, furthermore, turned into the problem: it is the ignorant farmer, or even the knowledgeable farmer who is unable to change his degrading production techniques, who is causing the ecological degradation of resources (Escobar 1995). He is trapped in a vicious circle of poverty and degrading production practices, and he needs external assistance in order to break out of this system.[3]

Imagine if we were to look at the "developed societies" within the same discursive framework. Then Switzerland, the richest country in the Western hemisphere, would perhaps be described like this:

> *"Switzerland is a small, landlocked country of which approximately half is barren mountainous regions. Traditional chieftaincies, which maintain considerable power, have for centuries held an isolationist policy, with the result that the country is excluded from all subregional organizations of*

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[2] Nobody apparently expects or demands that any concrete result should come out of all these conferences and seminars. An extremely interesting study came out of Niger (Daouda 1995), stating that only within the Ministry of Health 55 seminars were held within one year (1993). Of the 56 million CFA that this cost, a little over half were expenses on allowances. This perhaps explains the reluctance among the participants to put forward a more thorough critique of this apparent waste of resources.

[3] In this dissertation, I generally refer to the social actor as "he". No offense meant.

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cooperation. In certain cantons, it is only recently that women have been given the right to vote. The population is divided into four linguistically-different groups, who coexist peacefully for the time being. State revenues are largely mobilized through the low-interest disbursement of international criminals and dictators to the bank sector. Industry is under severe competition from competitive Asian economies, and heavily dependent upon foreign labor."

I am not trying to argue that the population of Burkina Faso does not face a series of problems, but these differ according to region, community and social place, and they might thus be viewed upon from the wrong angle. Take a map of Burkina Faso as the one below:
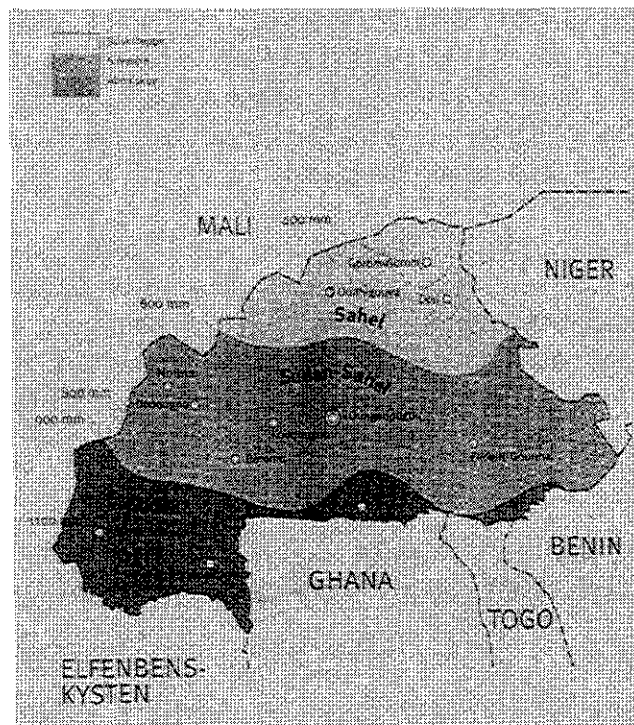
This map indicates rainfall averages in mm. in the different regions of Burkina Faso. Enormous amounts of resources have been used to determine whether the isohyets were moving southwards, what the cause was, how this could be influencing vegetation patterns in the country, whether it is technically possible to reverse this etc. The rainfall in the different years is, of course, extremely important for the rural agriculturalist or herder in Burkina Faso. I am not trying to argue that this type of research is useless. My point is that maps like the above become instrumental in the generation of politics, as they tend to give planners a sense of control. EU develop

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ment people have told me that "It would probably be a good idea to implement a policy dwhere the rangelands North of the 400 mm isohyets were reserved exclusively for pastoralism." Or that " For environmental reasons, our policy is that agriculture should not spread further into the bushlands and forests" (Pers. comm.) Maps thus give planners a sense of security leading them to put forward propositions like these, which are completely impossible to implement, and which make no attempt to incorporate farmers' own perceptions and strategies of natural resource management. In other words, they are politics addressing the wrong issues. Nowhere else other than in the Sahelian countries are decisions on such important issues based almost entirely on isohyets from maps brought in by foreigners.[4] The establishment of such a de-politicized and technicist discourse furthermore tends to lead to *gross exaggerations as to the possibilities of addressing problems of development through planned intervention.*

The overall research question of this report thus becomes *how do we assess the overall impact of development interventions in Burkina Faso.* This question raises two immediate sub-questions. First, to assess more precisely what the impact has been; and second to ask how we can assess impact. These two central issues of major importance must be raised when addressing development intervention. They throw into question the whole issue of planned intervention, and call for a deconstruction of the discourses behind this notion. They demand a critical reflection on the positivist idea that the impact of a given development activity is measurable. At the same time this forces us to reflect upon how we analyse the social change that occurs when development intervention is implemented. And, furthermore, a much more careful analysis is required of what Long (1992) calls the development interface, an analysis of the way different social actors position themselves vis-à-vis the development apparatus, an analysis which emphasizes the conflicting interpretations of a number of the central notions on which development is based.

Certain central notions involve the idea that it is possible to establish causal relationships between planned intervention and social change. This again leads to the assumption that social change can be engineered through development programmes and projects. This is what has been called the "tool-perfecting" approach (Marcussen & Speirs 1998), and it is the first intellectual approach to Burkinan development that will be treated in this dissertation. As it has already been revealed above, this approach will be subject to harsh criticism. A more laborious challenge is to construct an alternative theoretical and methodological framework for analysing planned development intervention, which gives an opportunity to "bring politics back in" (Munck & O'Hearn 1999). This approach includes a deconstruction of some of the central notions on which development discourse is built, and a more critical reflection on the political processes involved in implementing development projects, including looking at some of the conflicts over the meaning of the development activity. The following Chapter One will, therefore, attempt to address the following topics:

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[4]   Researchers' interest in determining for instance cropland availability and potential market integration on the basis of geographical information systems (Brunner & Nielsen, 1998) are other examples of geographical technologies, that seduce scientists into overlooking socio-economic parameters.

- An account of the "tool-oriented" approach. This account will try to show that viewing development as a mainly managerial problem misses the point, and at the same time makes us raise the wrong issues.

- An analysis of the discourses and narratives that have become instrumental in the construction of politics of development;

- The establishment of a theoretical and methodological approach which allows an analysis of the struggles over the political, economical, material and symbolic resources at stake within the ideal type of development intervention, namely the development project. This involves three different theoretical discussions:

> Anthropological literature on development (Laurent & Mathieu, 1994; Crehan & van Oppen, 1988; Olivier de Sardan, 1995; Bierschenk, 1988; Long & van der Ploeg, 1994) suggests that the development project be seen as an arena of possible conflict over economic, material, political and symbolic resources. "Participation" in development activities by farmers may, from this perspective, be interpreted not only as their effort to comply with project objectives, but also as strategic positionings where environmental improvements are a stepping stone to create linkages to external agents.
>
> Other theorists have emphasized how development discourse and narratives become influential in development policy-making within natural resource management, and are implemented in specific programmes, projects and methodologies of data collection and analysis (Hoben, 1996, 1998; Mearns & Leach, 1996; Roe, 1998; Speirs & Marcussen, 1998). These narratives describe how Sahelian agricultural systems have become "unsustainable" because of population increase, drought and lack of local capacity to adapt to new circumstances. This critical situation explains the need for external intervention in the form of rural development assistance introducing the means to reverse the natural degradation.
>
> Finally, certain theorists have questioned the entire notion of development by analysing donor/recipient relations not merely as 'partnerships' or 'patron-client-relationships' but, rather, as a field within which symbolic frontiers are demarcated through the enunciation of discourses of development (Ferguson, 1990; Laurent, 1996).

Chapter one, which carries the theoretical and methodological luggage, should then enable us to venture into the empirical account, allowing us to elaborate on the following points:

- A short account of the magnitude and importance of aid in Burkina Faso, and a brief description of what is considered to be the development problem in the country;

- A review of the analyses of aid to Burkina Faso with special emphasis on attempts to address issues of natural resource management. This involves looking into bilateral, multilateral and NGO aid, and exploring differences and similarities;

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- The concrete analysis of how different development project are inserted into local society, and which type of conflicts and social positionings occur. This will mainly be illustrated by empirical findings from Seno Province, supplemented with findings from Boulgou province. The most important part of the analysis will focus on the way development projects in the town of Dori are wound up in the web of local politics. It will also stress the relationships between the villagers in villages where projects and other development institutions are operating. This will be exemplified by focusing upon certain institutions and some of the "favourite" intervention forms within natural resource management.

The argument in these accounts will be that existing development initiatives are suffering from three shortcomings: 1) They are address issues, that are more based on preconceived notions and narratives of development than on problems derived from thorough empirical analysis; 2) They ignore the political implications of aid, and recast them as managerial problems 3) They hold that societal change and development can be implemented through planned intervention, which although in the rhetoric is adopting a "participatory approach" is extremely "donor driven" and cannot be otherwise.

An initial clarification: The critique of development and development aid in Burkina Faso in this report is not an attempt to reinvent the past as the good old days, calling for a return to a primordial African equilibrium, denigrating the externality of the African continent as entirely disastrous, and calling for a return to "traditional" values within African society. Neither is it to be seen as an argument that "aid doesn't help", calling for an argument that "it would be better to leave them alone". These arguments seriously miss the point. What I seek to do is simply to assess what development projects do in certain localities in Burkina Faso, ridding the analysis of the normative pretensions haunting current development discourse. In a sense I am myself extremely normative in my point of departure when discussing aid to Burkina Faso and Africa as a whole. I consider the current marginalization of the continent and the growing inequalities between Africa and the rest of the world outrageous. I am just not convinced that development and development theory provide the instruments to reverse this trend. The medicine for the lack of development in Africa has always been more development, and the treatment has not worked well.

Neither is it my intention to add to the fast growing literature on how to measure the impacts of development intervention, looking at the "efficiency" and "efficacy" of intervention, but forgetting to look at its more political implications, ending up doing analysis entirely within the conceptual framework of developmentalist evaluation thinking that we set out to avoid. Initially, I shall content myself with the rather unsatisfying description of "impact" as "The long term and sustainable changes brought about by a development project. Impact can either be anticipated in relation to the project's objectives or unanticipated" (Danida 1999a). This definition is not very satisfactory, first and foremost because it leaves one with the central question of what is meant by "sustainable". As we shall see towards the end of this dissertation, operating with causal relationships between development intervention and social change is in fact rather risky business, and the whole idea of setting out to measure impact should probably be dealt with with more caution.

The dissertation is structured as follows.

Chapter one is where the theoretical and methodological battles are fought out. First, a discussion of the theoretical thoughts behind the "tool-perfecting approach" is given. Second, I discuss the post-structural entry to the problem, through looking at development as discourse, and seeing a central problem in the relationship between knowledge and power within the development process. Thirdly, I explore the "actor-oriented" approach, as it has been applied in this study. The chapter concludes that it is primarily at the methodological level that the actor-oriented approach has advanced as it inherits some of the weaknesses of Giddens' theorisations on which it is largely based. I look specifically at the notion of methodological individualism, and I discuss the "levels" at which actor-oriented approaches operate. On the basis of this, a modified actor-orientation methodology is sketched out.

Chapters two, three and four are the empirical accounts. Chapter two is a presentation of Burkina Faso and the role of development in Burkina Faso. It presents a series of dominating narratives describing the crisis that the country is in, and describes the way development is designed to remedy this crisis. The aim of the chapter is to illustrate how certain discourses shape the politics of development and have a powerful impact on the way development projects are run.

Chapter three reviews a number of research reports assessing the impact of foreign aid to Burkina Faso. These reports, though often critical towards development aid, end up becoming "tool perfecting" and finalize by stating more or less normative demands for aid to address certain preconceived problems, tied to certain discourses of development. These critiques of aid fail to criticize the positivist assumption held at the outset that aid can be assessed, improved and addressed at certain social groups. The chapter furthermore illustrates that there is no significant difference between the problems encountered in bilateral aid compared to NGO aid.

Chapter four is an account on my findings from the town of Dori, supplemented with observations from the Boulgou Region. The historical and socioeconomic setting of certain projects within natural resource management is analysed and an assessment of the interface between projects and beneficiary groups is attempted. The chapter will show the fluidity of the institutional set-up and the widespread straddling by social actors between the different institutional spheres. It will show that the issue of "participation" is in many ways misunderstood, as all actors involved in development always "participate", in the sense that they all try to get the best out of development projects and programmes through processes of selection and seizing control. It will, furthermore, show that operating with spatial and institutional "levels" of analysis is very difficult.

Chapter five returns to a deconstruction of some of the key concepts constituting current development discourse. Participation, sustainability, self reliance, dependence and development, are issues that will be dealt with before I present a sceptical, but not too pessimistic, conclusion.

Chapter 1. Theoretical and methodological considerations

Though it be Madness - yet, there is Method in't.

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Shakespeare (Hamlet 2. act)

1.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I shall discuss three theoretical approaches to the analysis of development intervention. First, I present what I term the "tool-perfecting approach", exemplified by the works of Rondinelli (1993). Second, I explore post-structuralist critiques of development, the discourses of development, and the way they shape political action. And finally, I will take a more careful look at the "actor-oriented" approach which has influenced my empirical work.

1.2. The "tool-perfecting" approach

What I choose to call the tool-perfecting approach is not a coherent theoretical outline thought out by a few thinkers within a school of thought, nor is it a politically right-wing or left-wing phenomenon. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is a view which is shared by a very wide range of actors within the development field. It describes what certain people have called "developmentalism" (Olivier de Sardan 1995), in the sense that "tool-perfecting" upholds a normative belief in development as a feasible social project which is to be striven for through technological change and social organization. My argument in the following is that this view 1) Ignores the obvious political implications of this development and 2) is based on normative assumptions and narratives about development primarily derived from Western ideology. The "tool-perfecting" approach is found within virtually all the literature produced by the large development agencies (see e.g. Danida 1997a, 1997b, World Bank 1989). It is also very common in literature about NGOs (Edwards & Hulme, 1995; Gueneau & Comte, 1998) and, as we shall see in Chapter Three, also in more academic works within development studies. It is less prevalent within anthropology - anthropologists have, as already mentioned, always looked at development with a certain condescension.

The "tool-perfecting" approach to the critique of development intervention has its most prominent advocate in Dennis Rondinelli (1993) who makes a thorough analysis of a large array of the problems of development intervention, and proposes certain techniques to overcome these problems. His objective is very appealing: faced with the mediocre results of structural adjustment, and the inability to generate economic growth through "getting the price right" (i.e. the simplistic belief that the automatic pilot of the "free market" will assure that development will be "sustainable" and that African states will thereby, through a hefty diet start performing more effectively), he acknowledges the need to accept a large degree of uncertainty and complexity when planning development projects. It thus becomes a question of "getting the institution right"

as "sustainable and equitable development requires strengthening of administrative capacity throughout developing societies" (Rondinelli 1993, p. 185).

In his attempts to put forward suggestions as to how to design development projects, he stresses that there are limits to rationalistic planning and management. Projects have always shown a tendency to deviate from their original plans. This has led to very costly and ineffective pre-analyses, that have however not been able to solve the problem, and have cost astronomical sums amounts of money. Attempts at comprehensive planning did not reduce uncertainty. The complexity of planned development intervention and the lack of capacity in developing countries led to dependency on foreign expertise, leading to projects that were inappropriate for local conditions. According to Rondinelli, insistence on complex feasibility studies and cost-benefit analysis often lead to more capital-intensive and high-tech projects than are appropriate.

This technicist approach, again according to Rondinelli, leads to a failure in involving the intended beneficiaries in the planning and management of development projects. This has led to ill-adapted solutions, lack of participation and the transfer of inappropriate technology. The lack of project success then leads to constraints on managers and reluctance on their behalf to engage in evaluation and error-detection.

Development project administration must, therefore, be made more effective, but certain constraints appear. It is difficult to define goals more precisely: there has been a shortage of appropriate and adequate data and there has been an inadequate understanding of social and cultural conditions. Furthermore, international agencies and governments have lacked theincentives or controls to steer behaviour.

Furthermore, Rondinelli mentions that political dynamics are the most serious constraints on the planning and management of development projects. Not only do the donors (esp. USA) have clear political agendas behind their aid, but rationalistic planning also often leads planners to ignore the political aspects of aid, conflicts which only erupt after implementation. Different political parties may have strong interests in certain development projects, despite their low rates of return. As we shall discuss later, Rondinelli unfortunately does not take these constraints seriously.

Finally, he mentions the limited administrative capacity of many recipient countries, the Sahelian being the most clear examples of countries unable to make contributions as agreed, to recruit managers etc, causing delays and examples of "donor driven aid" (the latter seen as unfortunate, because it impinges on the country's ability to achieve self reliance).

Rondinelli therefore calls for a reorientation of development administration, not that planning should be abandoned, but that the existing methods, procedures and requirements are often misplaced and should be replaced with alternative methods.

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1.2.1. Rondinelli's adaptive approach

After this initial critique of the blue-print approach to development planning that Rondinelli provides, he turns to what he calls an "adaptive approach", based on the concepts of strategic planning, incremental analysis, experimental design, and successive approximation in decision making. He calls for a "process of project planning that can cope with the development problems in an experimental incremental and adaptive fashion" (1993, p. 118). He then lists a series of sequences according to which we should be able to plan:

> *By planning and implementing projects sequentially through experimental pilot, demonstration, and replication phases, problems can be disaggregated and alternative courses of action can evolve through what Korten describes as three basic stages of learning: (1) learning to be effective in assisting intended beneficiaries to improve their living conditions or to attain other development objectives;(2) learning to be efficient in eliminating ineffective unnecessary, overtly costly, or adverse activities, and identifying methods that are appropriate for larger scale application; and (3) learning to expand the application of effective methods by creating appropriate and responsive organizations to carry out development tasks. (Rondinelli, 1993, pp. 118-119)*

He then goes on to elaborate what he means by experimental, pilot, demonstration and replication projects, as a way of achieving a more adaptive planning approach.
Experimental projects are vital instruments in this approach. They are small-scale, exploratory and necessary when problems are not well defined. Normal effectiveness cannot be expected. He claims that all development intervention is in a sense experimental, as the outcome is unpredictable. Structural adjustment loans are examples of such experiments (with high costs for certain "beneficiaries", one might add). However, deliberately experimental projects are becoming more common. He defines five types of experimental projects: (1) those that focus on *problem definition*, i.e. not presupposing the nature of the problem, or describing all previous descriptions of problems as erroneous (2) Those that focus on *unknowns* seeking solutions to problems that are only partly defined. Knowledge is thus to be acquired and solutions proffered. (3) Other projects search for the *most effective means* of attaining objectives, by trying out different approaches to a given problem (4) Another type of experimental project tries to address deficiencies, i.e. how to break bottlenecks, or find ways in which farmers could address their problems. Finally, (5) projects described as *"natural experiments"*, i.e. not experiments *per se*, but solutions derived historically from successes elsewhere, and adapted in new contexts.

Rondinelli naturally stresses the need to involve beneficiary groups in these experiments, and furthermore warns that experimental projects demand qualified and highly-motivated staff.

Second, *pilot projects* can perform a number of important functions. These include testing feasibility and acceptability and serving as prototypes for larger-scale activities. In many cases the pilot project is the phase following the experimental project. Again, in this phase he stresses "The importance of community participation in design and management in improving efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability", (Rondinelli 1993, p. 134) and the need for the "support of strong leaders who are motivated by community spirit" (p. 135).

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When implementing pilot projects he stresses that the following factors should be considered carefully: 1) The basic knowledge, information and wisdom of people concerning their own living conditions, the identification of needs and desirability and practicality of new methods; 2) The specific and unique ecological characteristics into which innovations are introduced; 3) An understanding and respect for the diversity of cultural values and norms within communities; 4) Cultural traits that shape individual behaviour; 5) The formal and informal authority relationships within recipient society; 6) Leadership patterns and channels of cooperation, participation, interaction and communication; 7) Attitudes towards risks, achievement and motivational incentives (Rondinelli, 1993, p. 136).

The pilot project should, moreover, be designed in order to obtain the support or avoid the overt opposition of government officials, political leaders and vested interest groups. This can be combined with complementary and supporting resources, especially in rural areas where resources and infrastructure are weak. This, on the other hand, makes pilot projets rather costly, and pilot project staff should therefore be protected against undue political interference or pressure to produce quick results. But "if they change norms or values, diffuse new technologies or methods, or increase the willingness of people to consider new ideas, they may be well worth the cost" (p. 138). Finally, Rondinelli states that pilot projects should be run by "autonomous" implentation agencies that can provide them with sufficient political and administrative protection to allow them to run their course.

The third type, the *demonstration project*, aims to show that new technologies, methods and programmes are better than traditional ones, as they increase productivity, lower costs, raise income or deliver services more effectively. These projects also carry high levels of risk, and their success depends on a number of issues, including offering farmers security against these risks. Rondinelli emphasizes how demonstration projects should be "gradually and carefully introduced into communities" and stresses that "attention should be given to a timely completion" after transferring resources to those who will carry on the work.

Finally, Rondinelli mentions the last type of project, aimed at *replication, dissemination and service delivery*. This is the final stage in an experimental series, aimed at expanding productive and administrative capacity. Because "transforming experimental, pilot and demonstration projects effectively into continuing programs is crucial to sustaining their benefits. In this stage, as in all other phases of development projects, the participation of the beneficiaries is a primary factor affecting sustainability" (p. 144). A central factor in this sustainability is the likelihood that programs will survive the phasing out of international funding.

Rondinelli further acknowledges that commitment from state breaucrats in these types of projects can be problematic. The replication of small experimental projects can be potentially undermining the position of state bureaucracies, a process that they might not be interested in. There is thus often a discrepancy between what would be best in the national interest and what is feasible.

He mentions that the greatest problem is that it is often thought that projects can be replicated uncritically, without looking at regional differences within a country. Technical and organiza-tional problems become paramount here. Extension agents may be unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to perform well, problems of transport increase etc. The organizational challenge is to implement projects through a series of different institutions: government

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institutions a various levels, NGO's and the private sector alike. The ideal situation is when "governments in developing countries are (..) contracting with the private sector as a way of sustaining services" (p. 149). Interestingly, Rondinelli does not claim that the private sector is always better than the government. The political dimension is viewed as an obstacle that needs to be overcome. Towards the end of the accounts on how to implement development project he sets out the following 9 commandments:

- Managers should be committed and dedicated, and given necessary discretion;
- Supervision should be kept simple and chains of command short;
- Project control should be kept with a single organization, who can then subcontract with others;
- Staff should be qualified people from the area of the project;
- Staff should work through local officials;
- Staff, consultants and contractors should be recruited on the basis of their past performance;
- Political constraints should be taken seriously, and *when possible* priorities of local politicians who can affect the success of the project should be accommodated;
- Resources and attention should be focused on only one or two activities at a time;
- Subordinates should be allowed to be delegated responsibilities by the leaders in order to ensure that a large number of people substitute the leadership.

1.2.2. Rondinelli on reorienting development administration

Rondinelli highlights the failure of earlier development theory, which claimed that development could be achieved merely by transferring administrative procedures and technology from the West. Accordingly, we now need to acknowledge that the West succeeded because it developed a pervasive institutional capacity and the human resources to innovate. To copy this model is, however, extremely difficult and hard to plan and foresee, hence the need for experimentation. Structural adjustment frequently ignored the fact that institutional reform was necessary in order to promote economic growth, it was not enough simply to dismantle government apparatuses. Institutional reform like transferring planning, decentralization, participation in decision-making etc. are seen as important. The needed changes are therefore, according to Rondinelli:

- adjusting planning procedures to political realities;
- adopting a "learning approach" to planning and administration, in order to cope with uncertainties;
- capacity-building within government and non-governmental institutions alike;
- decentralization;
- simplifying analyses and management procedures within the aid apparatus;
- encouraging rather than suppressing error detection;
- creating greater flexibility for development administrators within the aid apparatus, to cope with uncertainty by offering incentives promoting innovation, risktaking and learning.

These points form what Rondinelli terms *adaptive administration*. This will, of course, not proceed in the same way as in the West, but the principles of experimentation and diversity are a legacy from the West which is worth copying. Surprisingly, he states that in this adjustment

process "no system can be effective if it ignores the political dimensions of decision-making" (p. 159). Planners and administrators are not politically objective or neutral. It is therefore necessary that development agencies operate more with incentives and less with control.

Nonetheless, immediately following this statement, Rondinelli states that "To be effective in the future, international assistance organizations and governments in developing countries must be reconstructed to promote the innovation and creativity needed to make them more responsive to the needs of their clientele" (p. 163). This should be done through promoting competition, organizing, marketing and introducing performance agreements. Control is unlikely to succeed, and it is only through participatory planning and adaptive management that it will be possible in the future to find new ways of creating conditions that will allow people to recognize and cope effectively with the inevitable complexity and uncertainty of development.

1.2.3. Discussion and critique of Rondinelli

Rondinelli's line of argument is very present in the ideological point of departure of many of the development projects and programmes running in Burkina Faso, and it is therefore important to go into a more detailed critique of where its shortcomings lie.

First of all, Rondinelli constantly segregates what he defines very loosely as development and politics. Development is "good" in the sense that it has to do with a lot of the notions he likes, i.e. efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, growth, production increase, productivity increase. Politics is seen as a "constraint" on all this; political opposition is seen as something that endangers efficiency, and leads to certain private interests being prioritized above the common good, which development is apparently addressing. He acknowledges that political aspects should not be ignored, but he does so anyway by introducing this segregation.

His text is also ridden with buzzwords. It is never clear what he means efficiency efficiency and sustainability; he states that management should be "careful" and that managers should be "responsible", "flexible", "innovative" etc. - notions that seem fair enough, but which upon more thorough scrutiny have little real content.

He grossly romanticizes development in the West by attributing its wealth solely to the development of a pervasive institutional capacity. I do not believe that Western wealth is derived entirely from a pillaging of the colonies and the atrocious extortion of surplus value from the working class, but I think that these factors ought to be weighed against his extremely technocratic interpretation of Western development.

It is thus not clear 1) What is meant by development, apart from the aggregation of the above "good" points and 2) What is the object of development.

This leads to a number of misunderstandings that will be pursued throughout this dissertation:

- The assumption that development is something everybody strives for;
- The object of development is always the nation-state;
- Problems of development turn into problems of bad management;

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- That the development apparatus in itself often becomes the largest sphere for primitive capital accumulation within this nation state;
- He presupposes a wide range of normative assumptions: that "modern" technology is better than traditional, that "culture" is an impediment to development; that development is a solution, not a problem;
- He ignores a more elaborate analysis of the state and modes of accumulation of wealth and power;
- He ignores the pervasiveness and instrumentality of development discourse in shaping the content of plans, thereby largely ignoring the interface between donors and recipients, reducing these to questions of more or less participation;
- He does not seriously examine how a project is inserted into a society, and does not look into all the "side effects" which arise during in project implementation and execution.
- He presupposes a normative and teleological assumption that development projects should eventually arrive at a stage where they are able to function without external support, thereby having achieved sustainability.

Rondinelli therefore does not provide sufficient analytical ammunition for an elaborate understanding of the shortcomings of aid in Burkina Faso. By clinging to ill-defined ideological notions of development, what was supposed to be "experimental" therefore ends up looking more like very fixed and predefined development activity, since the framework for experimentation and participation is established at the planners table in advance. As Hobart mentions, the "tool-perfecting" approach "presupposes society or social relations as some hypostatized pseudo-entity. Arguably, change is going on all the time and the problem, if any, is to account for the appearance of stasis. In whatever sense society may be usefully said to exist, it is not an object or entity" (Hobart 1993). In the next part of this chapter we will therefore see how these preconceived notions become instrumental in shaping development politics.

1.3. Post-structuralist approaches to the analysis of development

It is obvious that poststructuralist deconstructions of the notion of development and the elements that it comprises constitute an important source of inspiration to an analysis of development intervention. The new angle upon development as the problem and not the solution seems to indicate a possibility of looking afresh at some of the shortcomings of development projects. It also provides a more thorough critique than "tool-perfecting", which always ends up assuring us that when development failed, it was because it was not the right kind of development. These failures might thus be embedded not so much in the lack of capacity of the implementing actors, but in the discursive realm within which these projects are conceived.

1.3.1. The notion of development discourse

Central to the poststructuralist critique of development is the notion of the development discourse. Discourses are in a Foucauldian sense, carefully rationalized statements made by experts enabling a view of the human sciences as autonomous, rule-governed systems, founded on appeals to truths (Peet 1999). In this sense truth, power and knowledge become closely interrelated. Not in the sense that he who holds the power is the one who has the knowledge and therefore monopolizes what is true and what is false. Rather, it has to do with an elaborate conception of power, where actors and institutions do not "possess" power, power is not

attributable to a single social actor. A development discourse is not an ideology, which has little to do with "the real world", it is not some apparatus produced by those in power in order to hide another. It produces "domains of objects, and rituals of truth." Discourses are subjectless, they "inhabit" the social actor. The investigation starts by looking at development institutions' practices. These are often seen as rational and neutral, but it is exactly view of them as rational which make them producers of power. They shape how we are capable of thinking development. As Escobar, partly quoting Foucault, puts it:

> *Discourse analysis creates the possibility of standing detached from the development discourse, bracketing its familiarity, in order to analyse the theoretical and practical context with which it has been associated. It gives us the possibility of singling out development as an encompassing cultural space and at the same time of separating ourselves from it by perceiving it in a totally new form.* (Escobar 1995, p. 6)

My argument, in line with the above, would be that the proliferation of development discourse has made it increasingly difficult to attack any social or scientific problem in Burkina Faso without referring to the development of the country. I furthermore argue that this has resulted in policies that are not well suited to the realities as I found in my field areas.

So, how do we address this problem of analyzing the way discourses shape our ability to think about development. This process includes much more ambiguous elements of unintentionality and contingency.

In Edward Said's influential book *Orientalism* (Said, 1978), he argues that the interpretation of oriental societies as primarily colonies of Britain and France is still very present in virtually all academic work on oriental societies. Orientalism became a sort of government giving rise to the production of certain discourses about 'the Other' through which imperial powers were able to manage - and even produce - the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively (Said, 1978: 3). This he explains by the fact that no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ignore or disclaim its authors involvement as a human subject in his/her own circumstance. (ibid. p. 11) Furthermore, he highlights the fact that texts can create not only knowledge, but also the very reality they appear to describe:

> *In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of the author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it. (Said 1978, p. 94)*

In the 70s, this was a very provocative argument, as it challenged the Marxist hypothesis that imperialism required an ideology that could legitimize the extraction of wealth from the colonies. Said's hypothesis that the creation of this image of the Other was instrumental in the construction of an imperialist policy, turns things upside down and challenges Marxist notions of what determines social change and relations of power.

This creation of a discourse of the "Other" is useful when looking at development as well. As I mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, it has become increasingly difficult to view

economic and political problems in Burkina Faso as anything but problems of development.[5] And, as was Said's preoccupation, the genesis of this discourse is not just a legitimizing ideology constructed to explain, for instance, World Bank premiums. What Said does not reflect on much, however, is how the internalisation of this discourse becomes very strong among the Burkinans (i.e. "the Other), and is not just a Western view of the Burkina Faso development object.

The project is, thus, to trace how development discourse is translated into certain practices, exemplified by rural development activities in the Third World (a notion that Escobar vehemently criticises, as it is a derogatory objectification of a very heterogenous cluster of societies) or, more precisely, Burkina Faso. Escobar calls for the "turning of the (development) apparatus itself into an anthropological object (p. 107), moving from the textual and work practice of institutions to the effects of those practices in the world, how they structure the conditions under which people live. This is an important agenda. What is, however, important to avoid is the creation of an "anti-development" counter movement, which I fail to find in Burkina Faso, ascribing revolutionary agendas to people, and thereby once again objectifying the "target group" by turning them into anti-developmentalists, as is done by certain authors (Escobar, 1995, Munck & O'hearn 1999). Instead it seems more pertinent to look at new forms of clientelism and social positionings within the development apparatus as a vital strategy for resource mobilization, where new groups of actors, through the skilful deployment of development rhetoric, succeed in mobilizing resources (Blundo 1995).

As development is such an extremely normative and opaque notion, discourse analysis is a very fruitful entry point to engage in a more profound critique of development intervention in Burkina Faso. This theoretical approach however has certain serious problems which are moreover incompatible with the methodological individualism of the "actor-oriented" approach, that will be dealt with below.

A weakness of much discourse analysis is the almost conspiratorical character attributed to the instrumentality of discourses, shrewdly deployed by the powerful, who thereby construct or reinforce systems of domination. (See Escobar 1995). "Discourse" replaces "structure" in the old Marxist variant, discourses are deployed by the big international organizations and the donor countries in order to maintain the unjust world order, the heroes becoming the popular movements of the south, the NGOs turning their backs on development, highlighting local knowledge. "Think locally, act locally" is the new poststructuralist political parole. Local organisations, uninhabited by the development discourse, are seen as bearers of a new "antidevelopment". "It is from such movements that a genuine alternative development strategy based on empowerment might materialize" (Munck & O'Hearn:207). This is the "Emperor's new

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clothes", dependency theory in a new guise, but without the vitamins of the Marxist emphasis on material basis of the extraction of surplus from one class by another.

A poststructuralist deconstruction of developmentalism is therefore at times used as a means of establishing new forms of development based on "local knowledge", thereby accepting an uncritical interpretation of everything originating from a more or less arbitrarily constructed "locality". Poststructuralism should, however, exactly enable us to get beyond the binary oppositions involved in development discourse (local/Western, modern/traditional, Malthus/Boserup) leading to crude simplifications. Furthermore, poststructuralism should help us to undertake a critique of development work which deliberately tries to break with a type of critique (i.e. the tool perfecting-approach), where even the most critical discourse slips into the form, the logic and the implicit postulations of precisely that which it seeks to contest. (Munck & O'Hearn, 1999). If we do not succeed in this, we are back to square one, basing our normative hopes on a new object: maybe not development but possibly antidevelopment, alternative development or whatever.

Connected to this problem, there is another questionable point in the poststructuralist discourse analysis. With the Foucauldian notion of power as "a spiderweb without the spider" (Crush 1995), we risk ending up with a societal analysis where the social actor is completely obscured, where power has nothing to do with instruments of coercion, wealth etc. The Foucauldian analysis tends to lack agency (Giddens 1984: 145-162), and is at risk of resembling the functionalism which it set out to distinguish itself from. Instruments of discipline and government become obscure categories, power becomes completely faceless, and it becomes difficult to distinguish between different levels of subordination, coercion and legitimacy. Furthermore, there is a tendency to pay excessive attention to texts of development, sometimes unfortunately at the expense of work in the field (Ferguson 1990).

An interesting, but perhaps theoretically weak, book on the aid dilemma in Sudan (Morton 1995) interestingly stresses that the apparent "failure" of development aid in Sudan cannot be attributed to the dubious intentions of the aid workers who (at least the vast majority), in fact, do their best to get their projects going. Failure cannot be ascribed to the "Lords of Poverty" (Hancock 1989), greedy bureaucrats who have no other motivation in their jobs but to assure their own promotions, or in the worst cases the embezzlement of funds. The poststructuralist would claim that failure is to be ascribed to the impossibility to think development in terms detached from the realms of development discourse. This becomes instrumental in the outline and mode of implementation of development aid. I can only accept this argument to a certain extent. First of all, it overlooks the fact that these discourses are, in fact, constantly under fire, and it is too easy to say that all contestations are doomed because the paradigms that this critique sets out to dismantle are equally rooted in nineteenth century social theory. Development has changed dramatically over the years, and has brought about considerable social change. One needs to analyse these changes from a methodological individualist point of view as well, criticizing the positivist approach to the analysis of development intervention. This, coupled with a discourse analysis, (a somewhat messy bit of theoretical patchwork), might lead to a more constructive critique of development in Burkina Faso. It, however, leaves us with very few clear recommendations as to how to "improve" the performance of the development aid.

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1.3.2. Ferguson's contribution

The most celebrated post-structuralist analysis of a development project is Ferguson's seminal work "The anti-politics machine" about Lesotho (1990). In his widely acclaimed book, he stresses the paradox that a project such as the one he analyses turns out as a more or less complete failure but such failures are nonetheless repeated relentlessly, prolonged and even duplicated elsewhere. He explains this by referring to the fact that the side-effects, or the instrumental effects as he prefers to call them, of the projects are perhaps more important to analyse than the anticipated effects. The project in Lesotho did not succeed in eradicating poverty or increasing productivity within, in Ferguson's case, livestock production. However it was instrumental in the sense that roads were built and the role of government institutions in the local society was significantly enhanced. Ferguson therefore suggests that the observer focus on, not what turned out as failure i.e. what was not done, but rather on what was in fact done.

The planners of the projects saw what was termed an institutional and management crisis at government level as the main obstacle to the success of the project, but refused to recognize the political dimension of the bureaucracy in the capital. Government was seen as a machine for delivering services, but never as a way of governing people. This point is very pertinent, and could perhaps be supplemented with a remark that Bayart (Bayart 1989) has made: that state institutions should be analysed as the central arena for the allocation of funds and revenues. Development aid in Burkina Faso is a very central resource, used as a means to gain political control and power. It is, thus, not only the establishment of institutions, roads, prisons, schools as Ferguson mentions, but equally the interests involved in high paid jobs and logistics that can be used for purposes outside the strict project objectives, and outright embezzlements are frequent. Embezzlements should however not be considered as necessarily an example of dubious moral, but as a mechanism for building a power basis and constructing legitimacy.

A problem in Ferguson's text is that is maybe a bit conspiratorial in the sense that he apparently sees the project as an intentional attempt by the government to exercise control. I find it necessary at this point to stress what Morton (1995) emphasizes in his book on Sudan emphasizes, i.e. that aid failures cannot be explained by the dubious intentions of the actors working within the aid sector or machine or system or business. Aid workers generally try to combine serious work with the advantages of the high salaries that characterize the business, but there is no contradiction *per se* making it impossible that "hidden agendas" and what Olivier de Sardan calls *"accaparement"* of project activities, completely dominate the anticipated outputs of the project. As Crewe & Harrison put it "There is no coordinated conspiracy in the development industry, and not all projects obviously fail" (Crewe & Harrison 1999 : 188).

As certain reports show (see chapter 3), especially projects with low levels of participation and institution building components (infrastructure projects as the best example), have a low "failure rate", most often the roads are eventually built, and deteriorate afterwards like all roads do. What is interesting in the case of Northern Burkina Faso is that a large infrastructure project in Dori had real "side effects", not only what Ferguson calls instrumental effects. A local guy lamented that the presence of the Italian road building team had had serious implications: *"Ils ont carrément detruit le marché de femmes à Dori"*. Prostitutes had become prohibitively expensive for local men.

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In Burkina Faso there is no justification for saying bluntly, as Ferguson quotes Williams, " rural development turns out to be a strategy for increased state control of the peasantry" (p. 266). The state does not have a strategy *per se* for expanding its control, and it in fact seems to care very little about the peasantry (to the extent that a state can care). Ferguson, however, empirically shows that this has been the case in Lesotho, comparing the development efforts there with the "betterment" schemes of Apartheid South Africa and the Ujamaa experience of Tanzania. But he abstains from too harsh generalization, and calls for caution on two important points:
He focuses on the de-politicizing effect of development intervention. Development discourse tends to reduce the importance of all instrumental effects (expansion of administration, jobs) and downsizes potential conflict over resources, stressing the importance of overall development objectives like "poverty alleviation", "sustainable natural resource management", often to be solved within a national institutional framework.

Second, he questions the degree to which it makes sense to equate state power with "the ruling group". The researcher risks falling into a functionalist trap if the instrumental effects of a development project become analysed as the purpose of the development activity, as an intentional process conducted by a group of actors, knowing where they want to go. The state becomes a tool in the hands of a unitary subject.

Ferguson sees this point within a context of the evolution of theories of the African state. In the seventies, theories emphasized that "overdeveloped" states dominated its dichotomic opponent society, a view that has had serious implications in the outline of neo-liberal structural adjustment policies, where state institutions were cut and a destructive and normative belief in the market as regulatory mechanism has prevailed. In the eighties writers suggested that states were enfeebled, and even though they were autocratic, they were not able to exercise power over civil society. He mentions Bayart (1986), Migdal and Chazan as examples of theoreticians who stress the deceptive civil society, and the many popular modes of action that weaken the state. But where writers like Migdal (1994), Chazan and Degnbol (1996) venture into a taxonomy of what is state and what is society, thereby not producing much more than a static picture of the existing institutional setup in a given society and revealing little about mechanisms of exercising power and modes of accumulation, I think he is not entirely fair to Bayart, who deliberately denounces the conceptualization of the state as a unitary subject of a "ruling elite".[6]

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[6]   Ferguson totally renounces the concept of "civil society", which is indeed problematic. This is partly because neo-liberals have had a clearly instrumental and functionalist view of it, as social force which could be mobilized as bearer of development, a social field of intervention allowing a circumvention of the corrupt and ineffective state. Bayart, however, has a primarily methodological approach to the analysis of civil society, stressing the heuristic dimension of the concept. Referring to E.P. Thompsons view of classes as an analytical category, which is only meaningful if it is empirically and politically defined, i.e. if the class conceives of itself as being a class in opposition to other social formations, Bayart sees civil society as only making sense if it constitutes itself as such in opposition to the state. We are thus guilty of functionalism if we deduce classes, states and civil societies entirely from economic or sociological categories teleologically conceived of as bearers of this or that historical mission. In this sense it might make sense to talk of a civil society, if we immediately abstain from attributing it characteristics as democratic, grass-roots, backward, primordial, egalitarian, hierarchic or whatever. Furthermore we must accept that there is no red line to be drawn between civil society and the state, processes of search for hegemony are not restricted to such spatial or institutional spheres.

Having maybe read Bayart a bit superficially, he however proposes a very interesting path for the analysis of the state in Africa drawing upon Foucault, and quite close to what Bayart later formulated at greater length (Bayart 1989):

> *"one cannot begin by saying that the state is not an entity that "has" or does not "have" power, and state power is not a substance possessed by those individuals and groups that benefit from it. The state is neither the source of power, nor simply the projection of power of an interested subject (Ruling group etc.). Rather than an entity "holding" or "exercising" power, it may be fruitful to think of the state as instead forming a relay or point of coordination and multiplication of power relations.(-) "The state" in this conception is not the name of an actor, it is the name of a way of tying together, multiplying and coordinating power relations, a kind of knotting or congealing of power (p. 272).*

Seen within this framework, development projects do not necessarily expand the state's capabilities, but ensure that specific bureaucratic knots are tied. This is an interesting hypothesis for our case in the two sites in Burkina Faso where competing actors, NGOs, state agents and farmers all try to position themselves *vis-à-vis* bilateral development projects that are extremely resource-rich in terms of money and logistics.

There is however a remaining problem in Ferguson's analysis. He may not be guilty of being conspiratorical, but his notion of power makes extremely difficult to point the finger at certain social actors that might be more powerful than others. The lack of agency is critical once again. This is analytically unfortunate in our Dori-case later in chapter 4, where power and agency are closely linked. And it risks becoming very static, thus inheriting some of the less fortunate characteristics of structuralism.

Nelson & Wright (1995) propose a typology of power analysis, which they use in analysing levels of participation in development projects. They see three ways of analysing power. Power as power *to*, power *over* and power *of*.

Power *to* describes a situation where power, like human abilities, can grow infinitely if you work at it, and this growth within one person does not necessarily affect others. The danger with this definition is that it suggests that power is a personal attribute. Using this definition, "empowerment" becomes a reasonable and feasible project. This is clearly also Rondinelli's view upon power, and along with him most of the people working with participatory approaches within development (Mitchener 1998).

The second definition, power *over*, involves questions of how to gain access to political decision making. This involves a more structural and institutional embeddedness of power, and power is to be obtained through access to and control of these institutions. This definition however does

not provide much explanation regarding how power works, when coercion or any practical, ideological impact are not visible.

Finally, power *of*, which is Ferguson's version of power. Here, power is not a substance possessed, it is subjectless. This conception of power raises problems with the question of agency, but on the other hand it is effective when we attempt to understand why analyses of development deficiencies are not incorporated in the big development institutions' plans: They do not provide a charter for the sort of intervention that institutions are set up to do, they are discursively shaped the wrong way.

A last problem with Ferguson is that his analysis leaves little room for "recommendations", a fact which he is well aware of and does not regret. "So what shall we do?" people ask, "in order to assure development, to ensure that it's sustainable." His answer is interesting as he says that people are already doing it. Projects do not just fail, everybody tries to get the best out of them. The question we shall take up later is that with this attitude any kind of initiative to improve the situation of a given "target group", is immediately discarded as more or less doomed in advance, the possibility of a "successful" project is more or less ruled out.

In the following section, I shall try to remedy some of the possible weaknesses of the Foucault-inspired development critique by coupling it with an approach which places a great emphasis the single social actor, and the importance of stressing agency. I thereby hope to avoid the synonymous use of "discourse" and "structure", which I see as a frequently occurring problem, especially in the more populist accounts of post-structuralism (Escobar 1995, Munck & O'Hearn 1999). This may be seen by some as incongruous, but by deploying a little pragmatism, I think that it is appropriate, methodologically. It is an effective way of re-introducing politics into analyses of development assistance, thereby constituting a great improvement compared to the "tool-perfection" of Rondinelli and his likes.

1.4. The "actor-oriented approach"

In the following, I provide a description the "actor-oriented"-approach, which has been a guideline throughout my work on donor-recipient relations in Burkina Faso. The "actor oriented approach" has been launched as a "new paradigm" (Long & Long 1992), a term which I do not find very useful, as one of the strengths of this approach is precisely it's ability to contain a multitude of epistemological and theoretical differences. As I shall elaborate below, the "actor-oriented" approach is based on methodological individualism mixed with elements of Giddens' structuration theory (Giddens 1984, Kaspersen 1995), allowing for elaborate analyses of local power positionings, and of conflict over meanings of development discourse. I see the "actor-oriented" approach primarily as a methodological tool, which has a number of theoretical problems that will be discussed below. These problems are not made less complicated by their coupling with poststructuralist discourse theory, but when applied to the analysis of development intervention in Burkina Faso, this nevertheless provides a viable analytical point of entry.

I contend that the actor-oriented approach is the most fruitful way of analysing development work in Burkina Faso. It is productive to approach social actors as "not simply seen as disembodied social categories (based on class or some other classificatory criteria) or passive recipients of intervention, but active participants who process information and strategies in their dealings with

various local actors as well as with outside institutions and personnel" (Long & van der Ploeg, 1994, p. 64). This is, on the other hand, hardly very provocative when dealing with relations between donors and recipients, like in this case. The fact that a certain dissemination and selection of the "aid package", as it is often presented by the donor, takes place is hardly very controversial to the researcher of development aid. What one ought to discuss is that different actors have different means of being "active participants", a point that Marxists have equally stressed thoroughly (Corbridge, 1994, Leys 1995, Mouzelis 1995).

Actor-oriented approaches adhere to a sociological principle of *methodological individualism*, whereby we avoid seeing functionalist-deduced groups of actors as bearers of this or that historical mission. The "actor-oriented" researchers are, however, not all (Long 1992, Long & van der Ploeg 1994, Gould 1997) clear as to the theoretical implications of this, and the actor-oriented turn seems mostly to have been applied at a methodological level. Furthermore, the approach is inspired by some of the facets of Giddens' structuration theory, and has hence inherited some of its strengths and weaknesses.

1.4.1. Norman Long's presentation of actor-oriented research as a "new paradigm"

The most clear presentation of what is meant by "actor-oriented research", presented as a particular scientific approach to the analysis of rural societies, comes from Norman Long, notably in the introduction to his edited book on examples of this type of research "Battlefields of Knowledge" (Long & Long 1992).

According to Long, the paradigmatic status of the actor-oriented approach is justified as former approaches have reached an "impasse", which has already been widely discussed within development studies, a discussion that I shall not deal with at length here (See Bayart 1989, Booth 1994, Leys 1996). Former approaches, modernist and Marxist alike, have shared a linearity and evolutionalism in their view of development, a determinist and externalist view which actor-oriented approaches seek to avoid. Long stresses that the actor-oriented approach takes a special interest in the way similar structural circumstances produce differential responses, even when conditions seem similar. The actor-oriented approach departs from a dissatisfaction with attributing social analysis to external determination. Therefore:

> *A more dynamic approach to the understanding of social change is needed which stresses the interplay and mutual determination of 'internal' and 'external' factors and relationships, and which recognizes the central role played by human action and conscious-ness (Long, 1992, p.20).*

This marks a return to a certain type of sociology popular in the 60's and early 70's (Boissevain 1974), which however was unable to determine in a satisfactory manner how the surrounding societal circumstances influenced the social action of the actor. It tended to "explain social behaviour primarily in terms of individual motivations, intentions and interest," thereby adopting an "economic man" type of discourse, which upon careful scrutiny doesn't even hold in

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downtown Manhattan.[7] Furthermore, as will be discussed later, there was a tendency to exaggerate the intentionality and the directionality of the actors' actions.

1.4.2. The problems with the concepts of agency, knowledge and power

A major problem when operating with an actor-oriented approach is, of course, initially to define how we conceptualize the "social actor". Long draws heavily on the work of Giddens and his thoughts about reconsidering the role of "human agency". The notion of agency, according to Long, "attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion" (Long 1992, p. 22). Actors are knowledgeable and capable. It is, however, not only individuals that can be attributed "agency", certain organizations, institutions agencies, groups etc. are likewise able to act as actors. Long, however, cautions us not to attribute agency to cover collectivities that have no discernible way of formulating or carrying out decisions. The term "social actor" should, therefore, only be attributed to those social entities "that can meaningfully be attributed with the power of agency" (ibid. p. 23).

Concerning the question of whether we can permit attributing agency to even the weakest rural farmer, we return to the much quoted passage of Marx saying that "Men make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing" (in Giddens 1984: 14). In other words, the approach does not imply that it is the actors' own fault if they live in misery, or that they live in the societies they deserve. Our venture into rural Burkina Faso,where the inhabitants are perhaps some of the most destitute and marginalized on the world market (but not necessarily either poor or miserable), clearly indicates that the manoeuvring and positioning of rural farmers is very important to understand when analysing development. Many misunderstandings stem from ignoring this type of social action, termed "*Savoir faire populaire sociale*" (Olivier de Sardan 1995): their ability to manoeuvre *vis-à-vis* local authorities, how to get the most out of a rural credit system, how to answer a sociologist etc.

Agency, according to Long, is not to be equated with decision-making capacity alone, it is composed of social relations and therefore has to do with power. Effective agency implies the strategic generation of a network of social relations. It becomes important to win struggles over the attributions of specific social meanings to particular events, actions and ideas. For instance, development interventions can be seen as weapons in the hands of those promoting them, and the ones subjected to them will try to struggle to get the best out of them. Long quotes Giddens: "All forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors" (Long & van der Ploeg 1994). As we shall see in the following chapters, "dependence" is, in fact, not as Giddens and the majority of scholars of development suggest, seen by the destitute actors as a bad thing but as a desired position to be in, as this implies some sort of asymmetric reciprocity.

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[7]   For a later version of this debate look at the debate in "World Development" between Sara
        Berry, Pauline Peters and Robert Bates (1994), where the two ladies criticize the culturally
        specific "rationality" of Bates.

The actor-oriented approach is inspired by Giddens' structuration theory whereby relations of actors and structures merge, the constitution of structures should be understood in relation to human agency, they constitute one another (Giddens 1984). This is not played out in a mechanistic way: Long stresses that it is worth noticing that the actor could often have acted otherwise, structures do not determine the actions of the actor, they are at the same time constraining and enabling.

Long goes on to emphasize that societies contain different discourses and rationalities leading to different and conflicting strategies deployed by the social actor. Finally, he emphasizes that the term "social actor" is to be understood as a social construction, not as synonymous with "human being". Furthermore, one needs to distinguish between two different concepts of social actors: that which is culturally endogenous, and that which arises from the researcher's own categories. Neither of them are, of course, necessarily flawed, but both culturally and socially constructed.

Agency is thus constructed differently in different cultures and, especially when dealing with cross-cultural interventions like development, it becomes important to grasp these multiple realities. The construction of agency therefore requires (not surprisingly) an analysis of the construction of power and knowledge, which are closely interlinked. Power and knowledge is not something which is possessed: it emerges out of social processes. Agency can therefore not always be "imposed" or given as development practitioners try to do when they try to "empower" people or have them "participate". Power and knowledge become reified, and this process is an essential part of social struggles over meaning and strategic relationships and resources.

Longs account of actor orientation is methodologically extremely useful as a heuristic device for analysis of development intervention, a point which has been further developed by Olivier de Sardan (1995) in his attempts to develop methodologies for anthropological research on development, a point which I deal with at length below. The above discussion of power and knowledge is a good combination of Weberian action sociology and post-structuralism as sketched earlier in this chapter.

His account on "agency", however, inherits some of the problems of Giddens' structuration theory in its attempt to merge the structure/actor dualism. In attempts to define who we can reasonably define as actors, we are forced to content ourselves with a rather nebulous and normative definition. This problem is actualized when speaking of classes, where an old discussion between structuralists and adherents of action sociology concerning whether it is reasonable to speak of classes if they cannot be attributed agency, pops up. E.P. Thompson (1991) insists that speaking of classes, if they do not have the ability to act as such, or to define themselves as a class in opposition to or in alliance with other classes, does not make sense, an argument which is equally forcefully made within an African context by Bayart (1989). It is meaningless to try to deduce classes from functionalist economically-based categories, as this will eventually lead either to politically and analytically useless instruments which will only have esoteric and academic value, or to the attribution of "interests" and "consciousnesses" to certain social actors, who might not agree with these interpretations. Long claims that "classes" should not be considered as having agency, but if they don't, do we need the notion of class? "We must only define "social actors" as organisations and institutions that can reasonably be attributed this." This is no definition! It somehow calls for a strangely normative common-sense based definition of agency, which might serve well as a methodological tool but is very unsatisfactory. What is a "reasonable" attribution?

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The same goes for the structuration notion. Actors influence structures, which at the same time constrain, construct and enable the action of the actors. Yes, and so what? Again a strangely commonsensical argument, which I personally eagerly subscribe to, but which at the same time takes us back to an analytical square one.

Mouzelis (1995) argues that Giddens' actor/structure-dualism makes it impossible to identify the movers of social change, and that the agency-based approach makes it difficult to "scale" the different actors. Some actors are obviously much more powerful than others, they operate at different levels of society, and are so heterogenous that the term "social actor" becomes so wide that it becomes meaningless.

Furthermore, it is not clear to what extent the actors' actions are "strategic", there is a potential within Long's thinking of exaggerating the intentionality and directionality of the actors' actions. Gould (1997) thus claims that Long approaches utilitarianism in his insistence on the "room for manoeuvre" of the actor. Gould furthermore questions the ability of the actor-oriented approach to explain "what hold societies together", what defines a "society" and which mechanisms of compliance and affiliation are at work.

It is therefore more at the methodological than at the theoretical level that "actor-oriented" approaches have reached new frontiers. At the theoretical level they mostly resemble a series of sensible compromises, while stressing empirical work based on a *verstehende* sociological approach. In the following, three points will be discussed to clarify the problems mentioned above. First, the issue of methodological individualism. Second, the issue of "scale" or "level" of analysis; and third the question of "strategy" as a useable concept.

1.4.3. Methodological individualism

The actor-oriented approach marks the return of a tempered methodological individualism. The insistence on methodological individualism is, to some degree, sparked by a distancing within social anthropology from structural functionalism (Berry 1993, Olivier de Sardan 1995, Gould 1997): by emphasising friendships, networks, alliances, coalitions, and seeing actors as entrepreneurial manipulators of their interpersonal relations, and not as accomplishers of a historical mission or passive pawns within a system. The insistence on methodological individualism makes sense, as I see it, as a way to help avoiding that aggregates from social science (society, culture, ethnicity, class, kinship, mode of production etc) from being taken as collective subjects to which we ascribe all kinds of characteristics.

Methodological individualism has, according to Berry (1994), rightfully been criticized for treating social processes as multiples or weighted sums of autonomous individual acts. A number of misunderstandings concerning this concept have prevailed over time, giving the concept a utilitarian and *Zweckrationalität* - focused bias. Methodological individualism draws upon classical German sociology esp. Weber, but can in fact, interestingly enough, equally be traced back to Marx, who is ambiguous on this point, taking an individualist standpoint but later developing ideas like "objective interests" of members of different classes (See Boudon 1986). However, the voluntaristic assumption that people act isolated and without influence from their surroundings, always pursuing their self-interest constitutes a form of methodological individualism, which is more ideological than methodological.

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There is another danger which must be avoided, that of ascribing a single or unique rationality (most often economically optimizing) to the social actor. Actors circulate between several "logics", they act socially within a sphere which is often full of ambiguities, ambivalences, and different influences. What is important when looking at problems related to rural development in Burkina Faso is not to focus too narrowly on, for instance, farmers at local level, thereby overlooking the influence of bureaucrats, developers, businessmen, brokers etc.

It is, thus, important not to fall into a voluntaristic trap, giving insufficient attention to examining how individual choices are shaped by larger frames of meaning and action. Neither should we explain social behaviour primarily in terms of individual motivations, intentions or interests. Methodological individualism should enable us to avoid precisely this pitfall. Boudon's example (1986) explaining why individual motivations end up working against individual interests, is revelatory in this respect.[8]

There is a widespread fear of adhering to methodological individualism (Berry 1994, Gould 1997) because of the risk of being accused of being neo-liberal, economistic, ethno-centric, utilitarian and various other evils. A fear probably stemming from a time when structuralist Marxist thinking was very predominant. Another factor explaining the reticence of certain researchers to accept the principle of methodological individualism seems to be the understandable fear of being lumped with "rational choice" theorists, who end up postulating a directionality and intentionality to actions by social actor, which researchers ought to be the first people to question. (see Berry 1993b, Peters 1993, Bates 1993) Olivier de Sardan (1995) therefore proposes that one distinguish carefully between 1) methodological individualism, which is strictly methodological, and which permits an understanding of the multiple forms of friendship, networks, alliances and coalitions which characterize the African political landscape and 2) ideological individualism, which resembles neo-liberal ideology with its utilitarian beliefs in the economic self-interest and directionality of the individual action of the social actor.

Lukes (1968) in his classic critique of methodological individualism, lines up 4 central doctrines advocating methodological individualism, which according to him disqualifies this sociological approache's validity:

- a view that holds that it is self-evident that social phenomena can be explained only in terms of the analysis of the conduct of individuals, so-called "truistic social atomism".

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[8] The example given is the school in a Vesterbro-like environment. The parents caring about their children's education, wanting them to integrate with the immigrants, having all the right opinions about children education and the necessity of maintaining a high quality public schooling system, end up being the first moving their children to private schools. This accelerates the deterioration of the public schooling system. This is however just an example, it is by no means a law of social action. The same sociological principle has been applied to Sahelian rangeland in the "Tragedy of the commons"-narrative, where Hardin postulated that the free access to the grazing lands of the individual leads to the ruin of all. This narrative has however been convincingly refuted for its mechanistic application of ideological notions of social actors' guidance of self- interest and for overlooking the importance of local institutions' capacity to manage collective resources (Roe 1998, Juul 1999).

- The idea that all statements about social phenomena can be reduced to descriptions of the qualities of individuals. "Structures" make no sense, they are just aggregates of properties of individuals.

- Only individuals are real. Any concepts referring to properties of collectivities or social systems are abstract models, contrary to the notion of the individual.

  The allegation that there cannot be laws in social science, save insofar as they are laws about the psychological dispositions of the individual.

Giddens (1984) supports Lukes in disagreeing seriously with all the above points. The first is truistic and therefore in a sense beyond debate. And the following three are demonstrably false. What Lukes seems to be doing is looking at methodological individualism not as a heuristic category, but rather as a foundation for establishing societal laws.

It is, however, important to emphasize that the methodological individualism is *methodological*, and does not exclude an analysis of how societal structures and conjunctures shape the action of the social actor. Boudon (1986) thus insists that actors' behaviour can only be analysed in a *verstehende* way, and this requires strictly individualistic methods. Concepts such as will, consciousness, psychology (and I add strategy) can only be added metaphorically to collective subjects. Boudon goes on to emphasize that the principle of methodological individualism does not rule out the existence of phenomena such as influence, authority or charisma. This should not, however, be seen as indicating that the social actor is passive or fundamentally susceptible to manipulation. If, for instance, farmers in Burkina Faso are reluctant to adopt new agricultural techniques, we are required not to resort to "society-based" explanations like "it's the weight of tradition", it's "peasant modes of perception" etc. but instead to try and understand whether we as researchers would not have done the same thing. This does not exclude that certain farmers might be unwise not to change their practice, but then at least we will have understood this.

According to Weber (cited in Boudon 1986; Gerth & Mills 1958, p. 280) it is only the individual that can be attributed motivations and interests. If we start attributing interests and motivations to institutions, social groups, classes whatever, we may end up in an extreme degree of determinism, attributing, like certain Marxists had the habit of doing, "false consciousness" to social actors not acting like they were supposed to according to their theory. This often ends up in deliberate attempts to avoid understanding the motives of social action. Another danger is ending up attributing agency to notions that ought not be attributed with it, like "capitalism" or "modes of production" (Meillassoux 1975), repeating the functionalism of structural-functionalist anthropology.

According to Boudon, many misunderstandings regarding methodological individualism are drawn from misinterpretations of Weber's and Tönnies' distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Tönnies was focusing on the fact that interdependence was more marked in certain types of social context. This has, however, led to theorems stressing that in a *Gemeinschaft* individuality dissolves and becomes a focus of the collective will. The proof is the unanimity and

consensus of village communities. The individual, however, belongs to the *Gesellschaft*, which then again gets equated with "modern" societies; individualism is turned into ideology.

This misunderstanding, which is at the basis of many misinterpretations of rural African societies, results in a series of dichotomies operating within development discourse. The *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* duality is thus found in dichotomies of traditional/modern, community/individual, rural/urban, and even related issues like gift/money, clientilism/ bureaucracy, some feminists have even argued woman/man (Olivier de Sardan 1995).

The point is that though an individual's conduct is carefully scrutinized within village society, this does not mean that his/her individuality dissolves (one might argue that proof of this is that so many Burkinan escape the villages in order to go to the capital or to Cote d'Ivoire to avoid this scrutiny). It is, furthermore, not restricted to an analysis of societies, which are termed "individualistic", and according to Boudon neither does it only apply to "micro"-levels of society.

The strength of methodological individualism lies in its insistence upon the agency of the social actor, and his/her explainable action. But explaining this action is not that easy. Why does the actor do this and that? And how do we bridge the contradiction of not accepting entirely that social change is the aggregation of atomized individuals' actions? Boudon, the most enthusiastic adherent of methodological individualism stresses that there is no reason why we should not take macroscopic variables into account, and that issues of relationships and intersubjectivities are still a central concern.

Methodological individualists are right to be suspicious of the inherent essentialism and functionalism of "structural sociology", furthermore they are right to emphasize that we should not forget the knowledgeability of the social actor and insist that "social forces" are a mixture of intended and unintended consequences of action undertaken in specific contexts. But they are wrong if they instead reduce social categories to descriptions of individual predicates.

Giddens insists that methodological individualism and "structural sociology" are not mutually incommensurable alternatives. We, however, need to accept that "structure" is not the same as constraint, and that the terms agent, individual actor and agency need careful clarification, because who can be qualified as bearers of agencies? Collectivities? Institutions? Tribes? The Government? etc etc.

Olivier de Sardan has a similar project to Giddens, trying to merge these actor/structure dilemmas. He proposes two "heuristic points of view", a notion he prefers to what others call paradigms: "holism" and the methodological individualism. The study of development, he says, has to take a holistic perspective in the sense that it merges various registers of social reality, and is always economic, social, ideological and symbolic at the same time. In that sense, he insists on what Polanyi calls the embeddedness of the economy in the social life. This must, of course, not lead to a Hydénian normativism of "economies of affection" (Hydén 1983), but must, more specifically, force us to see the economy and social life as interrelated. On the other hand, we must be careful not to be holistic in the sense that we must avoid a functionalist view of society as a homogenous and coherent entity. Societies are neither despotic and totalitarian nor communalistic and egalitarian *per se.* We must avoid seeing in social action the simple effects of a system, not considering positionings within a social structure, a common feature within the

structuralist Marxism as well as among "culturalists" who see systems of cultural values, national characters, or "habitus" as stable social categories, enabling essentialist conclusions about certain typologies of societies (Bayart 1996).

There are thus two types of holism. The heuristic which emphasizes the transversality and multidimensionality of social processes, and the other which sees everything as a "hypertrophy of the system, the structure". These two holisms can be termed "methodological holism" and "ideological holism." In order to avoid any misunderstanding, it is the first kind of holism which is interesting when studying development.

1.4.4. The problem of scale and level of analysis

Mouzelis (1995) raises the problem of "levels" of analysis when operating from an actor-oriented approach perspective. As Booth (1994) also notes, the actor oriented approach has so far been most effective when dealing with "micro" levels. How does the actor-oriented approach work on a larger scale or level? Mouzelis questions the validity of seeing "macro"levels as mere aggregations of actions at micro level. These are very relevant issues to take up, but extreme caution should be exercised, to avoid confusing "micro-macro" with "local-central" (or "local-national", national-international) and with "actor-structure". As we shall see in the coming chapters, the referring of certain social processes to a defined space or level is rather more difficult than at first sight.

Actor-orientation at "macro" level has, according to Booth (1994), contributed to a healthy focus on diversity within development studies. First, it is now very difficult to operate with a notion like "The Third World", after the realisation that societies like Hong Kong and Burkina Faso perhaps did not have that many things in common. Later, it changed the focus of development studies from generalities about post-colonialism to analyses of specific features of the African state. Some resorted to generalizations about a specific cultural mode of dealing with economy (Hydén, 1983) Others provided the first ground for "actor orientation" through their meticulous analysis of social processes within the state apparatus in order to attempt careful typologizations of modes of domination and accumulation, (Berry, 1984, 1993; Kitching 1984; Bayart 1989). The good thing about these latter studies is precisely that they do not define African society as a diagram with decisions and struggles played out at different institutional "levels", but as a complicated mess of networks, factions and alliances which are constantly changing.

Migdal (1994) proposes an analysis of African state/society relations looking at the different levels at which state governance occurs and looking at the interaction between levels, an approach which has been labelled the "interactionist approach" (Degnbol 1996b).

In order to explain why political outcomes are not necessarily in line with what seem to be state "interests", but may stem instead from the complex interaction between different levels of the state, he defines 4 levels at which a disaggregation of the state should be attempted: The *trenches* (i.e. the lowest level, extension officers, school teachers who act with maximum confrontation with society). Secondly the *dispersed field offices* i.e. the national extension services and branches of ministries and the *prefecture*. Thirdly the *agency's central office, (la direction nationale*, ministries, PNGT offices) Finally *central commanding heights* i.e. the president's office, certain ministers.

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From an analysis of the different policies at these different levels, he concludes that conflicting interests on different levels often result in concrete state policies that have little resemblance to official statements.

Although he uses a Gramscian vocabulary, Migdal's institutional topography is strangely undynamic. This rather arbitrary defining of "levels" at which "state" and "society" interact, tells us very little about social processes concerning power and resource allocation, and will at best give us a more or less accurate picture of the state apparatus, which is nonetheless likely to look very different the following year. Furthermore, it reveals nothing about the social processes enabling social actors to "straddle" between the different levels, and between what is termed state and society. "State" and "society" are two distinct social spheres, and the state actor can have more or less contact with society. Finally, although he puts it in brackets, he assumes that there is such a thing as a state "interest".

It therefore seems fair to conclude that when Bayart and Kitching are successful in conducting "actor-oriented" research on a "macro" level, it is precisely because they do not confine themselves to establishing levels, spaces and institutions within which social processes can be boxed. In fact the micro-macro distinction more or less evaporates.

Booth goes on to explain how inspiration from actor-orientation has sparked research at "meso-levels". Actor-orientation has given new life to class analysis, moving it away from fruitless attempts to adapt imported models of class formation, hardly even valid in the northern industrialized countries, to societies in Africa. A result of this is a very widespread reluctance towards operating with a definition of classes within an African context, operating with other types of social organization, which are more relevant in Africa like clans, factions, ethnic forms of representation, networks, more fluid and invisible notions than classes (Cruise O'Brien 1976, Berry 1993, Bayart 1989). Without rejecting categorically the relevance of class analysis these studies have cautioned us to look at class formation in Africa as only very embryonic, and at the same time not as a process advancing as a result of some historical logic. Another "meso" level, Booth emphasizes is gender analysis, which has helped to unravel modes of subjugation and subordination, stressing at the same time the danger of importing normative assumptions of gender relations from women's movements in Europe and America.

At "micro-level" (which is the one I shall predominantly be examining in the following chapters), the actor-orientation has focused on the diversity of especially rural societies and their heterogeneity, highlighting the difficulties in applying grand models and schemes and attributing rural populations specific historical missions or essentialist characteristics. As will be discussed below, it has also turned the focus to, for instance, the analysis of institutions and issues that have tended to become depoliticised, such as "development" (Olivier de Sardan, 1988, 1995; Crehan & von Oppen, 1988; Bierschenk, 1988), or "natural resource management"(Laurent & Mathieu, 1994; Lund 1998).

Now, to what extent is this thinking on macro- and micro levels adequate? Mouzelis insists that if micro and macro are not linked to agency and structure, the distinction is a useful one. He defines macro as referring to cases where the impact of institutionalized rules or actors' practices stretches widely over time and space; micro applies where this impact is very limited. This

distinction should enable us to avoid reductionist explanations, jumping from levels of analysis of less-encompassing to more-encompassing social systems without taking into account their complexities. A micro-macro distinction remains useful in order to maintain a distinction between levels of analysis, making sure we become able to attribute the necessary weight to the different levels, thereby being able to distinguish between what is socially important and what is less important (Mouzelis 1995, p. 155). The problem is that if this distinction is to be withheld, it seems crucial to adopt strictly methodological individualism, something Mouzelis is not too enthusiastic about. And another problem is to define what are "micro-events", i.e. events that are confined in time and space. It becomes difficult to assess the importance of interaction (Giddens 1984, p. 142).

Ferguson (1998) eloquently questions the way we tend to construct "levels" or virtual "topographies of power" thus implicitly operating with a vertical ranking of institutions and spaces. The State thus tends to be placed on top of the institutional hierarchy, while a more or less ill defined "civil society" is placed at the bottom. Apart from framing the analysis within a national context where it often does not belong, it is wrong to see "civil society" as being necessarily "at the bottom" or representing some kind of "grassroots". As Ferguson shows, "civil society" is often made up of multinational organizations, NGOs and the like with a wide network of international contacts and considerable resources at their disposition. He suggests that viewed within a horizontal topography, the state-civil society dichotomy might show a quite different picture of the power implications within these issues. The topographies of power become active in shaping the way we shape our views on political realities, and therefore they become policy-generating as well. Mouzelis thus operates with a notion of the nation state (macro), which is a far more coherent entity than is the case in most African societies, and is therefore guilty of building imaginary topographies, as "state" is clearly on top, society at the bottom. Furthermore Mouzelis holds preconceived notions of which structures produce macro-levels, which type of institutions, etc. He is therefore right in maintaining that there are certain societal mechanisms and actors that are more important and decisive than others. The problem is that he is sometimes a bit too eager define in advance which institutions these are, a point which Ferguson rightly points to as dangerous within an African context.

The definition of levels of analysis must, therefore be dealt with with the utmost caution. Rigid distinctions of spatial and institutional spheres within which certain social processes occur end up obfuscating political realities and become instrumental in generating narratives of development, thereby proposing technical solutions to problems that ought to be analysed as political. The most interesting analyses of development in African societies (Berry 1984, 1993, Bayart 1989, Kitching 1984, Olivier de Sardan 1995, Mearns & Leach 1996, Gould 1997, Ferguson 1990, 1998) are interesting precisely because they succeed in getting beyond these levelings. The "local" appropriates, selects and alters "external" influences which again are influenced in a way which Giddens calls "double hermeneutics" (Kaspersen 1995). The notion of locality is thus produced, and localization is a process through which the production of locality becomes a change in sentiments, ideas and interests undergirding social actions. The consequences of this are that we must be aware of the dangers of looking too uncritically at the prospects of, for instance, establishing modes of "gestion de terroirs" as the power implications within natural resource management of may not be confineable to a defined space.

1.4.5. Understanding *verstehen*

The remaining, but intractable problem now becomes how to acquire sufficient information to be able to understand the individual action, how to be *verstehende*. This involves solving the riddle as to whether individual action can at all be explained in a meaningful way. The principle of verstehen is simple:

> *In the sense which Weber used it, it means establishing the kind of relationships between the actors' situation and their motivation and action which enable the observer to conclude that in the same situation he or she would probably have acted in a like manner being able to persuade his or her reader to feel the same". (Boudon 1986, p. 55)*

This sounds quite reasonable, but a serious problem remains. Culture, conjunctures, and the fact that social change apparently occurs in very different locations along similar patterns and at nearly the same time become hard to explain. A *verstehende* approach as it is outlined by Boudon above implies that the observer is very well aware of the contextual variables that shape the actions of the observed actors. Or, as Weber *himself* puts it, "Thus for a science which is concerned with the subjective meaning of action, explanation requires a grasp of the context of meaning *(Sinnzusammenhang)* in which an actual course of understandable action thus interpreted belongs". (Weber 1947, pp. 95-96)

Drinkwater (1992), is critical of the "actor-oriented" approach's ability to be applied reflexively to the researcher himself (Drinkwater constantly writes "herself"). He quotes Outhwaite:

> *(W)e cannot simply record , in an objective and valuefree way, the practices and beliefs of other human beings. The social scientist does not go into the field as a "tabula rasa" and return with an account of what it is like to be a European car worker or an African peasant; it is precisely in the encounter between the social scientist's own beliefs and practices and those people he or she is studying which makes up whatever understanding we can have of another social reality (Drinkwater, 1992:375).*

A friend of mine is carrying out an interesting study of young members of Pentecostal churches in Ouagadougou. She has been interviewing them about their views on Christianity, identity, life and their expectations to it, etc. At one point an interviewee said that he too wanted to interview her on the same issues. Going through the tapes after returning home, she found out that what she had answered was, in the best cases, a sensible representation of what she had thought at that particular moment, but in most cases outright rubbish, pathetic discount-philosophy on the meaning of life, carefully (but unintentionally) constructed in order to please the interviewer. This made her more sensitive to the importance of a critical hermeneutic approach, especially because the questions that she was asked were in line with her project, and therefore presumably more in line with her thoughts than the thoughts of the young *Ouagalais*. It was therefore reasonable to assume that their answers were even more far fetched. We are thus beyond a simplistic

interpretation of respondents answers as truthful or unreliable, what we are searching is understanding.

Drinkwater describes how his research in Zimbabwe among farmers showed that contrary to predominant official attitudes, farmers' practices were not inefficient and degrading. By "letting farmers speak freely" it was possible to uncover a perfectly understandable rationality. Drinkwater concludes that "In holding farmers to be ignorant we are confirming our own ignorance" (Drinkwater 1992: 377).

I think that Drinkwater contradicts himself a bit in the above statements. "Letting farmers speak freely" must mean giving them an opportunity to present their case to an outside observer. It is natural that they will try to appear knowledgeable, contesting the government extension agents' view of them as ignorant. "Speaking freely" does not necessarily imply that they say the same things to the researcher as they do to their fellow villagers. And the fact that they are knowledgeable concerning their agriculture is hardly surprising. I would therefore turn Drinkwater's statement upside down and challenge what I think is a problem in the actor-oriented approach: In holding farmers to be smart, we are confirming our own smartness as researchers. There might, however, be a stupid bloke or two out there, doing as his father told him, malnourished, never receiving much inspiration, tired and recalcitrant, unable to adapt to new circumstances. It has, however, become remarkably politically incorrect to say this. Researchers nowadays venture into the field precisely with the objective of corroborating that "local knowledge" is important, well adapted, rational etc. This is, in my view, a much more fruitful approach than anticipating that they are ignorant and need to be developed, it is also an attempt to be *verstehende*, but in a sense it is not less normative in its point of departure. There is thus no fool-proof methodology to be applied when setting out as *verstehende* sociologist, it depends on the researcher's knowledge of the society under scrutiny, as well as on his willingness to question the preconceived notions he shows up with. As I shall argue below it furthermore helps to focus on certain heuristic categories, such as conflict, within the society analysed, revealing dynamics, that may be hidden.

Finally, although most actor-oriented researchers are aware of this, I think there is a tendency anyway to underestimate the "bias" (I do not like the word bias, as this seemingly indicates that there may be such a thing as an "unbiased" answer) of respondents' answers to researchers, given the fact that the researcher is a potential ally and a link to an unreachable outside world. "We do not know how to attract the people of development, and we wish that you would help us" as a farmer said to me. Many are the letters that I have received from villagers stating that "Now that you have honoured us with a visit, and you have seen with your own eyes the misery in which we live, we would be most pleased if you would help us find a donor who can provide us with a well, as the one we have has just run dry". There is no real solution to this, I have tried to enter into more of a discussion/dialogue rather than interviewing on the basis of questionnaires, but there is no "solution" to this problem, one just has to accepts that the researcher is a part of the answer he gets.

1.4.6. Actors' actions

But how do we trace the genealogies of the societal processes that shape actors' actions? The actor-orientation is, as mentioned, derived from a Weberian analysis stressing a hermeneutic, *"verstehende"* sociology based on methodological individualism. We still, however, need

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instruments to explain notions like culture or other mechanisms that shape the actors' actions. As Weber states ""Action is social insofar as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual (or individuals), it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course" (Weber 1947, pp. 87).

Giddens has worked intensely with this problem in his "structuration theory" trying to get beyond structuralist and functionalist ways of emphasizing the preeminence of the social whole over its parts, in order to pay due attention to actors' actions. (Giddens 1984: 1-37) As mentioned above, his attempts to bridge the actor/structure duality did not entirely solve the problem, but rather reduced the notions to common-sense statements of interrelationships and intersubjectivities.

Gould (1997) in discussing certain deficiencies of the actor-oriented approach, tries to aggregate a view of African societies which he terms constructivist and which aims at bridging this gap. This view, based on a critique of functionalism, has sought to discard the empirical notion of, for instance, peasants as carriers of a certain historical logic (Marxist version) or as puppets of normative structures (early anthropology). Constructivists are linked to the notion of agency with Giddens and Long as two poles, where Giddens sees institutional continuities as structuring the unintended consequences of individual action - thus reproducing structure, and Long emphasizes the strategising intentionality of the individual actor. According to Gould, the most articulate presentation of this thinking has been undertaken by Sara Berry (1993).

Gould sees a problem in "constructivist" thinking, in that it is unable to distinguish itself from being lumped with neo-liberal notions of Africa falling apart. Actor-oriented approaches become unable to analyse the social fabric of African societies that "hold them together" or at least prevents a total breakdown of order. Is it "primordial bonds" or "economy of affection" or other value-driven models as functionalist anthropologists have seen, and as Hydén (1983) withholds today? Or is the social chaos present a result of the disappearance of these moral notions? Gould thinks not, but claims that the constructivist theoreticians are defenceless in the face of such claims.

1.4.7. Overemphasizing strategy?

There is a central problem in constructivist approaches which is again found in Olivier de Sardan's approach to the analysis of the development project as *"dispositif"*, i.e. that he ends up with a slightly utilitarian and even misanthropic interpretation of human action. Everybody is just out to make a buck, nobody works for the project or for the sake of the community, notions of "trust" and "communalism" are not only discarded as useless analytical categories, but even ignored as possible shared cultural traits in the society analysed. Greed, personal benefits and seizure of power and resources are the order of the day.

I cannot help to some extent accepting this very gloomy approach to the development field of intervention, but I would like clearly to distinguish this from a general and essentialist view of Burkina Faso as a society which is characterized by some kind of specific "moral"[9]. I would like

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to distinguish myself very clearly from a certain variation of this view purporting that people from Burkina are more treacherous than others. What I prefer to call a critical approach derives from what I have interpreted as the profound lack of legitimacy of the development institutions in Burkinan society. Although credit reimbursements and contracts for "beneficiary contributions" are often remarkably well lived up to (despite the fact that this is always lamented as a source of project failure, and the fault is attributed to the beneficiaries' ignorance (Burkina Faso: Ministere de l'Agriculture et des Ressources Animales, 1995), it is my firm conviction, and a point I shall elaborate upon in the following chapters, that a severe discrepancy exists between what the "beneficiary groups" see as their problems and what the donors provide. This leads to a situation where the embezzlement of funds, the misuse of logistics, the dilapidation of stocks etc. are looked upon as quite understandable, one might say that the people act in a *"verstehende"* way regardingthese things, had they been in that situation they would have done the same.

The field of this study is, thus, an environment where cynicism is quite widespread. I must however denounce such allegations, and, moreover, I find it unfair to accuse the actor-oriented anthropologists of development of such. To go beyond the normativism, and the *"langue de bois"* of development projects and reports is clearly not the same as turning cynical, neither is it dubious to look a bit further into the notions on which development projects and programmes are built. Furthermore, as stated above, this approach, which could be said to resemble utilitarianism, is primarily methodological and is not an attempt to establish essentialist patterns of human behaviour.

It is within this actor-oriented and constructivist approach to development that the notion of 'arena' has become fashionable. The development institution is such an arena where different groups of actors with different interests struggle over the meanings and spoils of development. This represents a move towards a more Foucauldian view of power. Within the arena, the question of power is closely associated with the actors' knowledge of the world. This has far-reaching implications for how people act *vis-à-vis* issues of economic morality, political legitimacy and other central societal ideas.

What Gould (1997) sees as problematic is the extent to which we can ascribe the notion of strategy to social action. The problem with ascribing strategy is that it may lead to an exaggeration of the intentionality of a given action, too much emphasis is put on the goal-orientation of action, and intersubjectivity is neglected. The problem facing the researcher's actor orientation is, as Gould formulates it:

> *Fieldwork monographs often rely on a quasi-literary narrative*
> *structure to organize the presentation. Instances of "extended case"*
> *and "actor-oriented" analyses, while allowing the narrative to retain*
> *the subtle interplay of a broad range of empirical factors, require*
> *dramatic structure in order to be readable. The temptation is great*
> *for the author to impute instrumentality to the actors in order to tease*
> *out the tensions and contradictions of social processes. As a result,*
> *what is intended as 'rich description' ends up as a as a story in which*

government" (World Bank 1989)

virtually all social action resembles the behaviour of shrewdly strategising actors. (Gould 1997: 67)

I feel a bit vulnerable in this respect, and it is a huge problem that the researcher faces when working with social conflict from a problem-oriented scientific approach. Adding to the problem is the fact that the "rich description" in this monograph is perhaps not as rich as it ought to be. It is a balance which has to be struck when one wants to avoid positivist accounts where social processes and production practices are seen as "measurable facts". When, as has been attempted here, we look at development aid interventions, it is important to look into how the different social actors attempt to "position" each other, but it is equally important to note that in certain cases, they in fact do not. Social actors within rural development sometimes, like researchers, ignore possibilities and options or prefer to turn their back to opportunities.

Bierschenk's and Olivier de Sardan's (1997) ECRIS-methodology[10] attempts to define a collective methodology for the analysis of conflict in rural settings, by defining what they term "strategic groups". "Strategic group" is a term introduced to supplant "social class", as this term is seen as not empirical enough, too economistic, too dependent on an analytical framework based on modes or forms of production. Strategic groups are groups sharing a set of interests within a local power framework, through social and political action. They are, in other words, bearers of agency.

Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan are at risk of overemphasizing the strategizing of the agent. What they do is, however, interesting insofar as this notion is methodological rather than theoretical and it is also an expression of considerable pragmatism. Bierschenk (pers. comm.) has even voiced a certain disinterest in what might be considered esoteric theoretical and epistemological problems, as it is the methodological tools that in his view lead to interesting new empirical work. What they stress is the temporary and "problem-oriented" character of the strategic group, individuals within this group might have differing interests on other subjects than the conflict or problem which is the research focus, and the group is not "structurally" embedded in local society, but might dissolve tomorrow. Still, the problem remains, as Gould has emphasized, that this emphasis on strategy may lead to a tendency towards implicitly assuming that actor-orientation has to do with "grass-roots", automatically is "participatory" etc. This criticism can however, easily, be refuted.

There is another kind of populism inherent in actor-oriented research, certain notions come into vogue, we no longer speak of peasants but of "rural entrepreneurs", we overemphasize the directionality in the actions of the actors by alluding to "strategy" when what is actually happening is that people just do what they always did. (Bierschenk has accused Alberto Arce of this, see Bulletin de l'APAD, vol 11, 1995) This kind of populism is potentially more harmful as it presupposes certain features, which should be dealt with with caution:

- it implies a model of rationality, people making their decisions consciously. This model of rationality will tend to end up making up essentialist characteristics about certain types of social actors, ending in a type of functionalism which we set out to avoid (For an example of this see Fiske 1992 on Mossi society).

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[10]   Enquête Collective Rapide d'Identification des conflits et des groupes Stratégiques.

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- it somehow exaggerates the idea of voluntary action determining social consequences. Social change is not always "willed", even though the actor may be knowledgeable and resourceful;

- it assumes relations between means and ends, as if people always had goals they pursued;

- it doesn't consider opposing interest within, for instance, households; it looks at households as actors, where these should maybe be further disaggregated.

I nevertheless share Olivier de Sardans pragmatic approach, accepting on the one hand that individual action is clearly not very strategic, but on the other hand, when focusing on conflict one must accept a certain directionality in social action, if not it would be futile to investigate it.

1.4.8. Summing up

Before outlining a more coherent approach to the study of development institutions in Burkina Faso based of Olivier de Sardans thoughts, it might be appropriate to sum up some of the trumps and shortcomings of the actor-oriented approach. The approach:

- Avoids determinism in the sense that we do not reduce human action to a schematic effect of certain structural laws determining the course of history. The idea, for instance, that an automatic proletarianization goes on in rural Africa because of on-going capitalist penetration does no longer attract that much interest. Neither does the idea that peasants think or behave in certain discernable ways when facing this or that problem or opportunity.

- Allows for scrutiny of the diversity and specificity of local circum-stances, accepting that apparently quite similar political and natural circumstances can result in very different outcomes, explained by specific local, cultural or even random events and characteristics.

- Allows for a return to a Weberian "verstehende" sociology based on methodological individualism, but at the same time ridding this concept of its utilitarian and voluntaristic elements.

- Opens for a much more nuanced analysis not just of the state, but also of, for instance, development institutions as arenas of conflict over eco-nomic, political and symbolic resources.

- Avoids seeing teleologies, i.e. goal or ends or directionalities of social processes. This, on the other hand, raises the challenge that it becomes hard to predict anything or to see any pattern in social transformation.

  - It can be coupled with discourse analysis, in the sense that it makes it possible to link the analysis of different actors' practice with 1) the way power and knowledge interact and 2) the way discourses are deployed

by different social actors, and become instrumental in the way development is implemented.

Problems with actor-orientation include:

- To call the actor-oriented approach a new "paradigm" is probably a bit far-fetched, especially as there is nothing specifically new about it, based as it is on Weberian action sociology and Giddens' structuration theory. The approach has so far primarily developed at the methodological level; the theoretical questions of avoiding seeing society as the aggregation of atomistic individuals are still not satisfactorily solved. Gould tries to solve this through a meticulous rereading of Weber, but does not succeed entirely in demonstrating this empirically.

- The approach risks leading to an overemphasis on the intentionality of social action, exaggerating the room for manoeuvre of the social actor, and putting too much emphasis on the notion of strategy. It thus risks becoming utilitarian, as it stresses interest over value-based action.

- The actor-oriented approach has problems at "macro level". Explaining the social changes within very large institutions or societies remains difficult. This is, however, not only a problem of actor-oriented approaches, but also of structuralist, functionalist or neo-liberal approaches.

When studying development intervention, the actor-oriented approach is the most obvious option, as it provides a means to get beyond the heavy rhetoric of development, and leads to a reassessment of some of the central notions on which development thinking is based. This reassessment will be dealt with in Chapter 5, and will include a discussion of the issues of participation, sustainability, dependency and development, proposing that these issues be seen in the light of an analysis of power, thus "bringing politics back in".

1.5. Study methodology

The intention in this dissertation has been to undertake an "actor-oriented analysis" of certain development interventions, where different actors and strategic groups are seen as pursuing different interests within the development project, competing for the political, economic and symbolic resources in which the projects are so rich. The study is, thus, not only an assessment of whether the development activities have been successful or not, it will also emphasize the contingent social processes accompanying the implementation of development projects. I am particularly interested in the social and institutional positionings taken in order to get access to the means for development.

In the following, I will propose an analytical framework, inspired by Olivier de Sardan (1995). He proposes an analysis of the development project as the "ideal type" of what he terms a "development deployment" (*dispositif du développement*). The development action should be seen as a an occasion for the interaction of social actors coming from different worlds with multiple behaviours and "logics". Social actors faced with the opportunities, resources and

constraints implied in development are therefore operating in a sphere of varied behaviours, sometimes contradictory, not only derived from individual options, but also from differing interests, norms and objectivities (Olivier de Sardan, 1995: 125).

It is, however, necessary that we do not fall into the trap of defining too rigorously what are the "strategies" and logics of the Burkina farmers, thus depicting essentialist patterns of behaviour of project "target groups". In defining forms of interaction between the project and its "target group" it is important, as I seek to do in the following chapter, to *pay considerable attention to context and historicity*. The context, often beyond the control of donors as well as recipients, (international conjunctures, climatic uncertainties, political changes in the capital, refugee influxes) influences the way "target groups" interact with the project. And the historical experiences and former development encounters shape the way target groups react *vis-à-vis* the project, as experiences, like in this case, are not always that good. Projects which see themselves as a rupture with past experiences of development "from above" with its noble objectives, are assessed by the target group on the basis of their past experiences, who remember that, for instance, the coercive Sankara experience of the eighties, was also initiated with the aim of helping the poor and promoting development.

Olivier de Sardan speaks of *four levels of coherence* of a development project, which are constantly challenged by the political realities in which a project is inserted. The *first* is a technical rationality which dominates the project setup, based on ideas of productivity and agronomic research, and which often ends up ignoring local agricultural knowledge of agriculture. The *second* is a willed coherence of political economy and national planning. The project is seen within this national political economy, a context which the "target group" is often not too enthusiastic about. A *third* coherence revolves around the role that donors have, their right of inspection and the imposing of certain logics and procedures (logical framework approach and the like), which might be quite alien to local conceptions of trust and control. *Finally*, there is the coherence of the project as a structure in itself, as a professional institution and often the biggest local employer, with its "informal" economy, its impact on local economies and power relations. The interests involved may weigh very heavily on project policy. One only needs to be reminded of the inherent contradiction in virtually all development projects, where the project, from the donors' point of view is intended as an intermediary arrangement which is supposed to end, leaving a set of activities which are intended to continue in a post-project phase. The personnel of the project and the target groups will often not share this interest in reaching a phase where they are supposed to be "sustainable".

Departing from an idea of establishing certain heuristic notions enabling analysis of these processes, rather than creating essentialist categories about "peasant behaviour", Olivier de Sardan proposes that certain *principles* and *logics* be established concerning the interaction between projects and "target groups". When dealing with projects, target groups act according to *two principles*, a principle of *selection* and a principle of *diversion (détournement)*.

By far the majority of development projects are based on a "package" of activities that are proposed to or even enforced on the target population. This package is always submitted to a kind of *selection*: certain activities are rejected, adopted and almost all altered according to the local circumstances prevailing. No package is accepted as a block. The second principle, the principle of *diversion* concerns the way certain resources for activities are diverted and used for more

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urgent needs. Credits are often not used for the intended purchases, a car is not used for its designated purpose, goods are distributed to other people than intended etc.

In addition to these principles, a number of *"logics"* prevail among target groups. First of all, when dealing with a project and when considering adoption of certain project activities, an initial concern as to farmers' *security* can be expected. Experiments with new crops, new cropping techniques or certain inputs can be difficult to afford if your harvest is at stake. Therefore people usually insist on seeing whether things are really that good ideas before adopting them.

A second logic is what Olivier de Sardan terms *"assistencialism"*. Many projects are based on a more or less implicit assumption that the project should support the "self- reliance" of the target group. This might be an appealing idea, but it remains a very moralistic and ideological concept which is not always easily imposed on others. In fact, the opposite is much more common: trying to maximize aid from the exterior and do whatever you can to assure that this aid is perpetuated. This logic thus often ends up causing serious contradictions in the philosophy behind rural development projects. For instance, the project staff themselves will have a very strong interest in the prolongation of the project for as long as possible, as "self-reliance" for them will mean unemployment.

A third logic is a logic of seizure *(accaparement)*, referring to a social process where any project activity necessarily becomes the object of social competition. One therefore often sees that a project intended to support a vaguely-defined community, ends up being monopolized or seized by a small group within the local community. This often reflects local power structures, but cases can also be found, where new groups (e.g. the young, the women) get organized and succeed in grasping the benefits from an external donor. This can include monopolizing the credit line of a project, strengthening power bases through achieving control over who gets to work for the project, etc.

These three logics are what could be termed "strategic logics". There are, however, equally certain *"representational logics"*, that need to be taken into account. Many project failures can be ascribed to different interpretations of certain issues central to the project (in our case, for instance, "participation", "land", "credit"). The misunderstandings that emerge from these different interpretations are not necessarily strategic, in the sense that they are results of deliberate social action by certain actors. They are results of differing representational logics.

This methodological point of departure seems to me to be much more pertinent than the recommendations of Rondinelli earlier in this chapter. Where Rondinelli ended by assuming implicitly that all involved partners automatically subscribed to an often very vaguely described endgoal of development, Olivier de Sardan draws attention to the very different interests involved and the potential conflicts that emerge out of these. Where Rondinelli often ascribes failures to lack of capacity and knowledge about the technicalities of the development activity, Olivier de Sardan points to the exact opposite, that "target groups" are very well aware of what is going on, position themselves accordingly, avoid getting their head chopped off by respecting existing constraints on simplified "empowerment", try to select what is useful, and, if resources are available, try to grasp control of certain elements of the development "package". Where Rondinelli brings his home-made (and Western) normative assumptions of what is good and bad with him to the field, Olivier de Sardan explores the social dynamics *sur place*.

1.6. The empirical accounts

The following two chapters will attempt to goanalyze various development project and programme outlines and political statements on Burkinan development in order to trace how development discourse and narratives have been instrumental in shaping current development politics. Chapter two is an attempt to present the country in brief, highlighting which narratives and discourses prevail in establishing the Burkinan crisis, and thereafter attempting to show which initiatives are taken in order to remedy this crisis. I will, furthermore, try to point to how, as in the "tool-perfecting" approach that we went through, political problems are constantly recast as technical problems, and how more difficult problems become recast as developmentalist tautologies and truisms, often confounding strategy and goal.

Chapter three is an account of different research which has been done in attempting to assess different types of aid to Burkina Faso. My aim here is similar, as this research, although much more critical, ends up being tool perfecting as well, trapped as it is within a development discourse which does not allow a sufficiently political view of development intervention.

1.7. Fieldwork

My fieldwork has admittedly not been conducted in a linear manner, and both research location and has changed considerably in the course of the work. The fieldwork was, furthermore, too short, and broken up into several visits. There are a number of personal reasons for this, and I shall not tire the reader with excuses and justifications. I am, however, convinced that any fieldwork will be confronted with the problems of running into *cul-de-sacs*, having to alter the focus of the enquiry, collecting information that is not very helpful, and my work is no exception. A more serious problem is, perhaps, that by focusing on problems and conflicts over development, there is a risk that I have given these issues an importance which is not shared by the actors involved. Furthermore, in following conflicts and my personal interest in these, I have, perhaps, been too eager to corroborate my suspicions about how things were, rather than trying to falsify my hypotheses.

From the outset, my intention has been to find good cases that could illustrate the problem that I was searching to elaborate upon. This has, perhaps, been done at the expense of representativity, some may even say systematic rigour. However, by looking into where things go wrong I believe it is possible to say more about what's normal than vice versa. By looking at events such as institutional conflicts of interest as heuristic categories rather than as non-representative coincidences, more revealing information was found. The problems of representativity, quantitative evidence, averages and other time- consuming elements of systematic research is not only one of laziness of the researcher. A sample of 120 villagers in 5 villages in the Boulgou region, selected on the basis of wealth-ranking exercises focusing on villagers' knowledge of, relationship to and opinions of development agents such as extension officers, NGO-*animateurs* and development project staff ended up not revealing too much, as the interviewer was a part of their strategic positionings *vis-à-vis* these institutions. In one of the villages it seemed that people had agreed or been told to say more or less the same to the interviewer. And in all cases there was a marked reluctance towards expressing any dissatisfaction with development agents, presumably because sanctions were feared, or because they thought this would deprive them of any future collaboration with potential donors. Quantification like "95% of interviewees expressed

satisfaction with the existing extension service" might therefore not give any exact picture of how relations are between development institutions and farmers. One has to follow the leads one gets.

The problem has been that as more insight was gained, the focus of the research changed. From being initially sparked by a wish to look at institutional conflicts over the spoils of development, especially on conflicts between NGOs and government institutions, the research has become more focused on what I term development institutions, their dealings with recipient groups, and the political struggles entailed in this. The obvious reason for this is that conflicts between institutions are confined to an NGO/government dichotomy, and especially not on a more analytical level to a state/civil society relation. Another point was that conflicts were not as fierce and overt as I had expected in the region when the research was started. An initial belief that a certain dynamism within the widespread "groupements villageois" existed furthermore appeared exaggerated.

Another problem whichemerged in the first stages of the workconcerned my attempt to link institutional conflicts and agrarian changes with structural adjustment programmes, trying to deduce the "local level" impact of these "macro-economic" policies. There seemed to be far too may contingencies and mutually conflicting social and economic processes occurring that any attempt to deduce specific causes and effects appeared rather hazardous. Findings only seemed to be able to question the grounds upon which the macroeconomic policies were built, and to point to the plurality of responses and results of policies with specific objectives.

A third and more serious problem stemmed from the difficulty of finding interesting entry points to the analysis of institutional positionings and conflicts within development activities in Boulgou. It was difficult to "break the ice" and get beyond respondents' reluctance to reveal controversial information: the conflict-centred analytic approach was not successful in finding any conflicts. It was, therefore, at a rather late stage decided to investigate another locality, Dori in the Seno Province, where research was much more fruitful. Thisdecision was taken at a rather late stage, where not much time was left. This is problematic, but there is not much to be done about it. Research in the Dori area was focused on different actors' positionings around different development projects and development institutions, bilateral projects and local NGOs alike.

Natural resource management projects and programmes in Burkina Faso are to a large extent based on *activities defined on the basis of preconceived notions* of what the problems of rural development are, rather than on thorough local studies of the perceived development needs of the "target" population. This enabled me to discuss with the different actors whether they saw the project objectives as the most central given the local context.

On the other hand, the projects all subscribe to a *participatory approach*. I had to to assess carefully how different actors involved (e.g. different beneficiary groups, non-beneficiary groups, extension agents, project leaders) viewed the participatory approach of the projects in question.

A central element of this participatory approach is the *support for the creation of local institutions* able to define and plan activities to improve the living conditions in the local society. These institutions are seen as central awareness raising instruments, whereby, through a better understanding of their situation, people will be able to organize for improvements of their living

conditions. Thorough attention has been paid to this process of institution creation, in order to reveal the dynamics behind it.

Finally, development projects are very concerned about the *sustainability* of their activities. This sustainability includes three elements, 1)an *ecological* sustainability, stressing that natural resource management activities supported by the project should enhance natural resource management practices, and not cause a degradation of the environment; 2) an *institutional* sustainability, stressing that support should be backed by a capacity-building component, assuring that institutions are created enabling a continuation of project activities beyond the project intervention phase; and finally 3) a *financial* sustainability, aiming at scaling activities to a level where they do not become economically prohibitive the moment they are not supported heavily from external sources.

It was noticed that different actors have quite different interpretations of these notions of sustainability, which can lead to certain misunderstandings.

As a final point, development projects in Burkina Faso all have the ambition of creating *independence*. A central concern of the project is the planning of its own demise; it is important that projects support "help to self-help", and that they do not create relations of dependence between the donor and the recipient groups. What is meant by this normative notion is ,however, not always clear, neither is it obvious why it is seen as so important.

The three points, participation, sustainability and dependence will be dealt with again in Chapter 5, as they constitute some of the central reasons for conflicts over meaning of the development efforts in Burkina Faso.

In pursuing the work, an iterative approach was adopted which concentrated on the following elements:

- Discussions with project personnel, and excursions to villages, where they presented project activities;
- Interviews with village officials;
- Group discussions with villagers at sub-village levels;
- Interviews with project staff of other development and projects in the Region
- Household surveys, focusing on villagers' perception and relation to the project;
- Interviews with selected villagers according to social status on project-related issues;
- Interviews with key informants, i.e. people that were said to have a specific knowledge of the issues to be explored.
- Interviews with politicians, functionaires and "traditional" leaders.

My attempt has been to "trace peoples' movements through interviews and observation as a means of understanding the porousness and flexibility of social and spatial boundaries". (Berry 1994) This may not be overtly systematic, but on the other hand it seems as the number one rule of thumb in the field. In a sense it is revelatory how this can lead to seminal research on social processes in Berry's case, but it can also lead to the opposite. In connection with another research,

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I recently paid a visit to The library at the University of Dar es Salaam, in order to see what kind of research was done on the Kigoma Region in Western Tanzania. Most of the research was from the seventies, the days of plenty at that university. But nearly all of it was focused on issues like "capitalist penetration and proletarianization of the peasantry" although with the power of hindsight one can see that the work was completely detached from reality. Another striking example is the influential French researcher, Guy Belloncle, who in his work on peasant associations in West Africa (Belloncle 1983) sees a great potential for rural development in the support of local peasant associations. The reason for his optimism is what he sees as the primordial structures of mutual help, egalitarianism and solidarity within the villages in the Sahel. His ideas have been effectively refuted and are nowadays mainly seen as flawed, and there is a general attitude that egalitarian is precisely what society, "primordial" or not, in the Sahel is not. The lesson to learn from this is probably that the researcher's wish to present a politically convenient message at times leads him/her to trace corroborations of his/her preconceived notions rather than being critically hermeneutic. Nevertheless, these studies are based on fieldwork, they are not just made up at the researchers' desks. It serves as a reminder the power of preconceived notions, the way they shape our selection of data and our understanding of the reality we find.

Furthermore, given the extremely uneven character of the researcher/respondent relationship it is obvious that in the respondent's interactions with the researcher, s/he will often attempt to confirm the outsider's preconceived idea, or to turn him/her into an ally in the struggles s/he is engaged in. Finally, farmers may selectively adopt outsiders' developmentalist idioms and try to turn them into their own advantage in their struggles over development means (Mearns & Leach 1996).

An important part of the research into development institutions' insertion into Burkinan society is, therefore, an analysis of these preconceived notions onto which development is constructed.

Whether I have succeeded in this is up to the reader to judge. One thing is, however, sure. At the end of our empirical accounts, wewill encounter problems answering our main formulated problem. Given this more theoretically-grounded and elaborate entry to impact analysis, we risk that what we are able to conclude becomes terribly elusive. This might however not be such a bad thing and it may lead us to reconsider our expectations, not onlyof what we can get out of impact studies, butalso of development as a form of induced social change.

Chapter 2. Images of Burkina Faso's development

2.1 Introduction

Burkina Faso is a small West African country in the Sudano-Sahelian climatic zone of Sub-Saharan Africa bordering Ghana, Togo, Benin and Cote d'Ivoire to the south, Mali to the West and North and Niger to the East. It covers approximately 274.000 square kilometres and has a population of around 11 million (10,1 at the last census in 1995), of which 3/4 is considered rural. This population consists of approximately 60 different ethnic groups, with the *mossi* dominating both demographically and politically. Burkina Faso, formerly known as Haute Volta, achieved independence from France in 1960. French is still the official language.

The climate is tropical with a rainy season of between three and five months' duration, peaking in August. Rainfall decreases as one moves north and averages at 3-400 mm in the North and 1100-1200 in the South. This rainfallvaries considerably, within each season and from year to year. The last 25 years have had an average annual rainfall significantly below the preceding 25 years. Agriculture is based on smallholder farming with millet as the most important crop. Especially in the Southeast, cotton is an important crop, and is one of the country's main exports. Extensive livestock-raising is the other very important natural resource management practice, especially in the Northern part of the country. The coastal countries constitute the traditional market for export meat, which together with cotton are the two most important export commodities. Demographic growth is 2,4 % per year, and population density is high compared to other countries in the Sahel. Technological change, population growth, and changing rainfall patterns have been elements in important changes in natural resource management practices since independence.

Other economic activities of national economic importance include mining (esp. gold) and tourism. The latter has an interesting branch as the capital, Ouagadougou, is evolving into a conference centre of West Africa; an astonishing number of international conferences and festivals are held in Ouagadougou.

Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world. With a GDP per capita of 250 US$ it ranks the 11th-poorest country, and it is usually among the bottom five on UNDP's Human Development index list.

Why does this chapter begin by repeting these data that begin virtually any report on development in Burkina Faso? Why is rainfall considered worthy of page one mention? In the pages that follow an answer to this question will be traced, as it is my initial hypothesis that emphasis on these data become important in the construction of politics of development in Burkina Faso. These data frame our understanding of the country and limit the way we are able to conceptualize the country, or perhaps the societies that constitute the country. They are part of a development discourse within which a variety of implicit assumptions are tacitly accepted, but at the same time

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not clearly enunciated. Initially, one can conclude that Burkina Faso seems to have a series of problems (poverty, natural resource degradation) that need to be addressed.

2.2 Development aid to Burkina Faso

Problems of poverty and natural resource degradation are being addressed through development aid. Being a relatively easy country for aid donors to work in, it is one of the most aid-influenced countries in the world. Not that Burkina Faso receives as much aid pr. capita as many other countries, e.g. Senegal which received 3 times as much aid pr. capita at the end of the 1980s (Gabas et al. 1997). However, a million dollars is a lot of money in Burkina Faso, and approximately 90 % of all public investments are externally funded (ibid.)

The main bilateral donors are France, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark and US, contributing 250 million US$ in 1995 (EIU, 1997). Multilateral aid is at an almost similar level, 227 million USD in 1995, of which the World Bank's International Development Association has consistently been the most important. A multilateral donor gaining importance is the EU. Finally, there is another type of capital inflow that should be mentioned, roughly a million Burkinabe's are working in Cote d'Ivoire and remittances constitute a large input of capital channeled directly to the family target group of the immigrant. This is however rarely invested in development, but more often in more profitable business or the mere reproduction of the family.

Development Aid thus stands at roughly 0,5 billion US$, or 20 % of total GDP. Of this aid, about 70 % is in the form of grants, the rest in often-renegotiated loans. An interesting aspect of this aid is that approximately 15 % is directed through a plethora of NGOs. There is, however, uncertainty as to the exactness of these amounts (Gabas *et al*, op.cit.). This is, according to Gabas, apparently because of deliberate opacity in their accounting systems. Nevertheless, NGOs have been seen, mostly by bilateral donors, as a new and interesting way of circumventing the state as partner, in order for donors to reach their target groups more easily.

The NGOs operating in Burkina Faso are organized in their own umbrella organization, SPONG (Secrétariat Permanent des Organisations Non-Gouvernementales), which has roughly 200 member organizations. These are under the auspices of the government-run National Monitoring Bureau BSONG (Bureau de Suivi des ONGs). Once registered by BSONG, an NGO is entitled to a number of advantages, notably tax exemption. In order to ensure that the number of NGOs does notsoar, BSONG has had to outline a number of criteria that an NGO must fulfil in order to obtain this status. A certain size in terms of budget and a 'development agenda' are the most important. Although the number of NGOsis striking, and the space they occupy within the development business is important, it is not higher than in other countries in the subregion. National NGOs have, however, attained a high reputation for their innovativeness in organizing and mobilizing rural people and foreign funds, and have raised high expectations within certain circles of development studies and the media (Pradervandt 1989). In the nineties, the World Bank is sees great opportunities in supporting NGOs: "The advantages of most NGOs can be found in their work at the grass-roots level and in their flexibility, which is great enough to allow for unorthodox approaches. NGOs have a capacity to sense local needs, listen to people and take their traditional knowledge seriously, and make local populations integral partners in development rather than the objects of development" (Leisinger & Schmidt, 1999).

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An important aspect of development aid is that it is virtually impossible to assure any kind of co-ordination. Being the rich almoner, a bilateral donor is normally unwilling to submit its activities to the will and command of others, and therefore claims that 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'. The Northern NGOs normally follow their own ideologically based agenda, and are therefore equally unwilling to subordinate their activities to the auspices of others. The institution which would seem the obvious choice in executing this co-ordination, the government of the country, is more or less at the mercy of the donors, and is very tempted to gear its activities according to the priorities of the donors. The result is very tough conditions for planning, all government activities are to a wide extent 'project-run', not least all planning activities (see Marcussen & Speirs, 1998).

Development assistance to Burkina Faso can thus be said to be:

- Economically insignificant when seen in a larger global perspective or when seen from the perspective of the donor economies. 0,5 billion US$ is not a lot of money when shared by a large number of economically strong donors;

- Extremely important when seen as the share of development activities that are funded from abroad. According to certain sources, 98 % (Danida 1997) of all activities within what is termed 'environment' are funded from abroad;

- A very diverse socio-economic field with a large number of social actors pursuing a series of rather varying interests within government as well as non-government institutions;

2.2.1. The Burkinan crisis

Reports on development aid in Burkina all point to the fact there is a huge problem in Burkina Faso. The aid that Burkina receives is going to provide *development*. Development is the means by which Burkina Faso is going to get out of its state of *crisis*. The crisis has several dimensions. There is an *ecologic* crisis, where ecological equilibrium has to be restored. There is an *institutional* crisis, as the institutions necessary for the effective management of development are not available. Therefore, aid has to include an institutional capacity-building component. And there is a *management* crisis in the sense that not all players are accountable, not everybody is participating, there are problems of misappropriation and embezzlement of means for development aid. These issues have to be addressed in order for development to be *sustainable*.

It is interesting to note what the crisis seemingly does not imply. There is no mention of, for instance, farmers being backward or ignorant: the involvement of local knowledge is seen as important. This is not always the case in development work. In a recent study I conducted with a Tanzanian colleague (Kaare & Nielsen 1999) on the impact of a Danish development project in Tanzania, it was an initial assumption in the project documents that the local people were very "undeveloped" and backward. There is no mention of ethnic or traditional impediments on development, there is a general acceptance that the blame is very much on the donors (Gabas et al, 1997; Lund & Marcussen 1996; Danida 1997).

2.2.2 The ecological crisis

This dissertation is not a contribution to the debate on whether a process of desertification is going on in Burkina Faso (there indeed seems not to be), whether the environment is degrading or not in the Sahel, or whether human natural resource management practices are contributing to this degradation. This has been convincingly done elsewhere (See Juul, 1999, Benjaminsen, 1998, Scoones et al. 1994). Rather, I venture into an analysis of how discourses of degradation become important for policy making in Burkina Faso. This has serious implications for the manner in which development projects and programmes are run, and for the way donor-recipient relations evolve. For the time being, I shall content myself with presenting what seems to be the dominating discourses in framing the environmental question in the Sahel.

- A narrative purporting that natural resource management has gone from a sort of equilibrium to a disequilibrium. Accordingly, an exceeding of the "carrying capacity" of the land, has led to use practices are no longer sustainable.

- An assumption that this equilibrium can be reinstated by merging local and imported technologies and by mobilizing popular support.

- An implicit linking of environmental degradation to demographic growth, stressing the Malthusian rather than the Boserupian perspective.

- An assumption that there is a correlation between vegetation cover and rainfall, i.e. that the latter can be influenced by a man-induced change in the former.

This discourse orientation of the question of natural resource management is of course not uncontested, and serious efforts to question these discourses are made. Mearns and Leach (1996, p.6.), however, point to the fact that these contestations often end by dichotomizing the debate, which eventually becomes unhelpful, common property vs. privatization, Malhusian degradation vs. Boserupian intensification, backwardness of peasantry vs. utilizing local knowledge. This can be expanded to the whole question of development, where dichotomies abound, development/politics, traditional/modern, local/foreign (oftenequivalent to traditional/modern) state/society. This is an example of how even the most critical discourse slips into the form, the logic and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. We end up discussing the wrong issues.

2.2.3 The institutional crisis

As I will try to show in the following chapter, donors understandably lament the failure of aid initiatives to successfully build institutions capable of pursuing aid activities beyond the project phase. This problem has been raised in a number of different settings and different solutions have been proposed as to how to solve it. The institutional problem seems to address the following shortcomings of Burkinan institutions:

- They do not have the necessary capacity, human logistical; staff are not sufficiently trained, and resources are too scarce to enable a renewal of logistics as they deteriorate.

- The *"monde rural"* in particular has an unused potential, as it is dispersed and unorganized. Important improvements of rural populations' poverty and marginalization could be envisaged if they were organized effectively.

- Accompanying institution building with project aid is seen as increasingly important as more emphasis is put on the sustainability of the aid. As aid is ideally seen as something which ought to plan its own demise, it is important to plan from the start so that institutions are set up that will be able to continue the activities without external support.

- Perhaps for diplomatic reasons it is considered politically incorrect to mention the fact that assuring the continuity of these institutions, which are ideally intended to "wither away", is an essentially political question.[11]

2.2.4 The Management crisis

Burkina Faso has a management crisis, the political system is not able or willing to decentralize resources and lack of accountability, transparency and democracy are exacerbating corruption. (It is interesting that it is after the introduction of structural adjustment reforms and parliamentary elections that the problem of corruption has become serious. Earlier, the country was characterized by what has been termed surprisingly good management (Gabas et al 1997). The pluralisation of society, however, seems to have fomented corruption.)

The cure this crisis is seen to lie in the reform of the political system through decentralization, support for democratization and the privatization of institutions likely to perform ineffectively or as centres for nepotism and embezzlements of public funds. This has been initiated through structural adjustment measures, and a policy of decentralization but according to donors in Burkina Faso, the problem is growing.

In donors' address to these three crises, we clearly recognize the "tool-perfecting" approach as it was sketched in the beginning of the previous chapter. The development problem is a problem of the right type of technology, management and institutions, problems which sometimes

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11   The withering away of institutions potentially exercising power like, for instance, the state is one of the notions within populist versions of Marxism which has met the most serious problems when confronted with political realities. People from Eastern Europe will know about this. Stalin solved the problem by introducing a pseudo-dialectic notion of "withering away through strengthening". It seems to me that donors are facing some of the same problems as Marxists/Leninists had looking at communist Eastern Europe. The withering away of aid, and its planning of its own demise, its ideological objectives of providing "help for self-help" are not going well. The current approach to this problem, by shifting to programme aid, institution-building and capacity enhancement in fact resembles this "withering away through strengthening". I am, of course, in no way proposing any resemblance between donors and Stalin.

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deliberately, sometimes unintentionally obliviate the political dimension and the power implications of development.

2.3 Development assistance within natural resource management

It is a common assumption that the problems faced by Burkina Faso are linked to the backwardness and low productivity of its agriculture and livestock sectors. Widespread rural poverty and all indicators on health and education being extremely low corroborate that there is a problem which needs to be addressed. As approximately 75% of the population is considered 'rural', the development problem of what is termed *'le monde rural'* is considered of the highest priority, and constitutes an important 'challenge' as it is called within development jargon:

> *'Slow growth in agricultural production has been a serious problem*
> *in Sub-Saharan Africa, challenging domestic and foreign policy-*
> *makers. Accelerating that growth will require important contribu-*
> *tions from agricultural extension and research.' (World Bank*
> *research observer, vol. 12, no.2 Aug. 1997)*

Growth in agriculture is seen as the *sine qua non*, and in the nineties growth is furthermore associated with the need for development to be sustainable. As two World Bank consultants note:

> *Sustainable economic and social development will be possible in the*
> *Sahel-and in most mainly agricultural developing countries-only if*
> *rural development is sufficiently accelerated and agriculture becomes*
> *considerably more productive.* (Leisinger & Schmitt, 1999)

The problems are, however, not only limited to low productivity. According to development plans and policies, unsustainable land use management has caused serious degradation of natural resources (Burkina Faso, 1991). Demographic growth and decreasing rainfall have put a pressure on natural resources, rendering 'traditional' management practices inadequate to address these issues (Danida 1997b). Furthermore, these traditional management practices have not been able to define new solutions, and have been unable to tackle the degrading impact of the activity, thus creating a vicious circle of poverty and degradation, where the rural producer is unable to change his/her production techniques because of the poverty he/she faces, whilst he/she at the same time enhances his/her poverty by further degrading natural resources. (Gvt. of Burkina Faso 1991; Gbikbi 1996; MARA 1995). Donors therefore speak of a merging of traditional and imported natural resource management techniques, but immediately thereafter disqualify the traditional ones as unsustainable and inappropriate:

> *Traditional and modern natural resource management methods must*
> *be more closely linked in the future to promote agricultural develop-*
> *ment. Examples include less use of slash-and-burn techniques,*
> *allowing reforestation in erosion-prone areas, development of*
> *ecologically acceptable forms of cultivation such as agroforestry,*
> *and improved rangeland management. In the interest of development,*
> *it is very important that any measures taken support men and women*

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> *engaged in small-scale farming, since they constitute the majority of*
> *the population in the Sahel(Leisinger & Schmitt, 1999).*

As we can see, slash-and-burn techniques are discarded, agroforestry and improved rangeland management , although it has been only very partly successful, is praised, and rural "men and women" are lumped together as one apparently homogenous group, which should be supported, not for their own sake, but in the interest of development.

Furthermore, development aid of course works within a specific historical context in Burkina Faso. Within agriculture, the rapport between rural producers and institutions with the task of assuring their development has always been based on the establishment of local institutions, or *"groupements"*. If farmers wanted credits, fertilizer, extension, pesticides, plows, in short development, they had to organize in *groupements,* formed by the national extension agent. The enormous number of village *"groupements"* in Burkina Faso (some say up to 12.000)shows that organizing within such institutions has become a conditionality if farmers want contact with external actors. We are, in other words, far from the Rochdale-model of farmers' co-operatives, where farmers unite to face a usurping state or class of oppressors.

A list of historical events over the last 15 yearsis relevant to enhance understanding of the organization of the *"monde rural"* and its relationship to donors and the state. In 1983-84, two years of consecutive drought hit Burkina Faso, emptying rural populations' granaries, severely diminishing livestock numbers, causing massive migrations and leaving people at the mercy of emergency aid organizations. This introduced nurturing contact with external aid organizations as a potential survival strategy.

In 1983, the Thomas Sankara "revolution" took place, an event that seriously disrupted systems of subordination and power (customary, religious, economic and political) at all levels of society. In an environment of both coercion and enthusiasm, systems of subordination were no longer necessarily seen as incontestable or indisputable. In this turbulent context, old accounts are settled, new alliances made, old autocrats are overthrown or reinvented in new guises (See Laurent 1996). Through a political will of the government to transfer power to village levels it becomes apparent that "no condition is permanent", that things are changeable. Accordingly, the fact that organized collective action could lead somewhere made a long-lasting impact.

In 87, however, it became apparent that there are limits to the changes one can expect. With Sankara assassinated, a return to former types of subordination began. But this was accompanied by new trends within development discourse, where structural adjustment programmes emphasize the necessity of breaking the state monopoly as development institution. This discourse shared with the revolutionary rhetoric of the Sankara period the emphasis on the importance of "grassroots" development, an organized civil society. It meant an increased importance of development means transferred to NGOs, and with this, new types of positionings and conflicts of how to access and distribute these means, as well as it meant new relations between government and non-government institutions, suddenly in potential conflict over external resources.

The last ten years have also witnessed a sweep of externally-driven ideas concerning democratization and decentralization, processes that have not resulted in significant transfers of power or

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redistribution of wealth, but which have undoubtably inspired certain social actors within the field of development to venture into more adventurous social experiments.

A number of projects and programmes have been outlined and implemented with the overall objective of addressing problems within natural resource management. These activities range from the 50 million US$ PRSAP- project *(Projet pour le Renforcement des Services Agro-Pastorales)* financed by the World Bank, to bilateral development projects and small local NGOs trying to raise money from foreign sources for their 'grass-root' activities. These development institutions are highly heterogenous in the way they are set up, in their approaches as to how their activities are to be undertaken, but they share to a remarkable degree the idea mentioned above, that there is a problem, what the problem is, and that there is a need to address it through outside assistance. Over the years what have been seen as the central problems have changed, as well as the way solutions are implemented. Nevertheless, development has always been seen as the solution to these problems. And development has always been the main objective for rural producers, when these have been organized. The organization of the peasantry or *'le monde rural'* has always been a precondition if rural producers wanted to deal with institutions doing development, be these the state, colonizing powers, bilateral development projects, commercial enterprises, parastatals or NGOs. Of special interest is the *Programme National de Gestion des Terroirs"* aimed at supporting institutions capable of assuring sustainable land use in the rural areas. This initiative is supported by a long array of donors, among others Danida and the World Bank.

2.4 Danish bilateral aid to natural resource management in Burkina Faso

Danish aid is based upon support to certain sectors. The notion of "sector" is a bit problematic, and certain issues are seen as overarching the different sectors wherein Danish aid is operating (in Burkina Faso Denmark works within agriculture, energy and water). The "cross-cutting issues" include participation, gender, sustainability, poverty orientation and strengthening civil society. All this is finally going to lead to development, the grand and final cross cutting issue. In Burkina Faso "environment" is not a sector, but a "cross-cutting issue."[12]

Burkina Faso was appointed as 'Programme co-operation Country' by the Danish government in 1993. This was a result of considerations aiming at widening the range of countries receiving Danish development assistance. The choice of Burkina Faso was justified by stressing that the country had a good reputation as only moderately corrupt, it had a decent regime, adapting to WB and IMF policies, and undergoing democratic institutional changes. Finally a number of environmental problems seemed to be a cause for concern, a type of problem requiring Danida's special attention. Desertification and natural resource degradation had for a number of years been a major priority in Danish development assistance, and multilateral aid to Burkina Faso was already being financed through UNSO, to address these issues. (Lund& Marcussen 1996). Danish NGOs had, furthermore been, operating in the country for a number of years.

The choice of Burkina Faso was, however, equally a sign of considerable pragmatism on the part of the Danish co-operation, as the president of Burkina Faso, Mr. Blaise Compaore, can hardly

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[12] In certain programme countries, environment is, however, considered a sector.

be accused of democratic behaviour bearing in mind the way he has seized power. Being number two in the 'gang of four' that gained power in a bloody military coup in 1983, declaring the revolution and embarking upon some quite remarkable social transformations, he was behind the assassination of his superior, Thomas Sankara, in 1987 and later as well of the two other members of the quartet Mr. Jean-Baptiste Lingani and Mr. Henri Zongo. However, in 1990-91, President Compaore embarked upon a process of democratization, allowing a free press and oppositional political parties and adapting to the structural adjustment policy requirements of The IMF and the World Bank. This change has led the bulk of the donors, including Denmark, to accept atrocities of the past.[13]

Another reason why Burkina Faso was chosen as programme country could be that it submitted to the structural adjustment policies in 1991. The following of the conditionalities of the Bretton-Woods institutions has always been an imperative for Danida's support of Programme cooperation countries.

Compared to other African countries, Burkina Faso signed structural adjustment loan agreements remarkably late. Certain observers point to the fact that the country in fact embarked upon a "self-imposed adjustment" already in the Sankara era, but donors generally nevertheless speak very derogatorily about the economic performance of the country in this period, despite the fact that big donors like France withdrew their aid quite quickly for political reasons. The World Bank states that

> *"(..)With bold and egalitarian objectives, the regime nonetheless undermined the economic base of Burkina Faso and its efforts proved unsustainable. The regime's political orientation was inspired by central planning and a Marxist-Leninist ideology, distrustful of external intervention in particular the Bretton-Woods institutions.(..) In the social sectors, the government sought to improve the education and health status of the population through aggressive vaccination and literacy campaigns, and launched the construction of a large number of health centres and schools. The authorities actively promoted environmental conservation and the role of women. Burkina saw several years of growth, fuelled by high public invest-ment, good weather and increased agricultural production in the onchocerciasis-freed areas, but nonetheless faced economic crisis as the economic foundations of the policies pursued were weak" (World Bank 1994, cited in Speirs, 1995).*

As Speirs notes, it is interesting to see that when a "Marxist-Leninist" regime does vaccination campaigns they are "aggressive" (although UNICEF gave them full marks), not "effective", or

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[13]   In December 1998 the most outspoken critic of Compaoré, the editor of the independent newspaper, "L'Indépendent", Mr. Norbert Zongo, was murdered by several armed men. Donors have (which probably makes sense within a diplomacy-logic) remained cautious about criticising the president and have awaited the results of different commissions' work. The result of the work of these commissions has now advised the president to withdraw and call for new elections. The strategy of Compaoré now seems to be procrastination, there has been no reaction to the commissions' recommendations. A situation that seems to suit the donors, as this assures business as usual.

some other more positively laden adjective. It seems, though, that the reason why the terms of the structural adjustment policy were relatively modest was that the Sankara regime had attempted to moderate spending. It is, however, equally interesting that what was dubious in 1994, egalitarian objectives and central planning, is now part and parcel of the World Bank package. The Bank-people Leisinger and Schmitt thus insist that

At the minimum, development policy must include the following:

- *Political decision making that "combines the free market principle with the social equilibrium principle." This means creating an environment that encourages economic development by, for example, promoting private initiatives. It also means abolishing fixed prices and introducing sociopolitical policies that enable the poor to satisfy their basic needs.*

- *The construction and development of infrastructure, such as roads, transport and storage facilities, electricity, health care and education institutions, drinking water supplies, and irrigation systems.*

- *Measures to protect the environment and preserve non-renewable resources.*

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- *The promotion of small businesses and local crafts. (Leisinger and Schmitt 1999)*

The difference between this approach and the Sankara-one is, however, that the "social equilibrium principle" is hard to trace as anything but noble intentions in this newer edition. Where Sankara attempted *de facto* delegation of authority and resources to rural areas (admittedly with a greater or lesser degree of success), it remains a mystery how free market forces alone will assure this equilibrium for the first time in world history in rural Burkina Faso. Empirical findings from the capitalist era of world history in fact seem to suggest that free market principles and social equilibrium principles are virtually impossible to merge. As colleagues have shown, the World-Bank-encouraged planning efforts in Burkina Faso are likewise extremely centralized "top-down" and "donor-driven" (Marcussen & Speirs 1998).

Many of the elements that the Bank criticizes from the Sankara era are thus duplicated in the nineties. Nowadays, the Bank claims, the efforts are more sustainable. What this sustainability means, however, remains a mystery which we shall return to towards the end of the dissertation.

Danish aid thus attempted to be a more integral part of a Burkinan agricultural policy, which is fundamentally defined by the World Bank. In Danida's Programme Support Document (Danida 1999b) it is stated that Danish Agricultural support to Burkina Faso is based on the strategic outline and priorities in the Burkina Government's strategy note and action plan. On top of this, the Danish Government has added an emphasis on poverty alleviation, sustainable use of the environment, equality between the sexes, and the development of democratic institutions.

On the basis of this, a series of areas of intervention have been identified for the development of the agricultural sector.Combined, these aim to reach an overall goal: *to improve living conditions and the economic security of the rural population.* This goal is pursued in order to solve the problems seen as the main problems of the rural poor. Danida formulates these problems as 5 subgoals:

- *Improvement of natural resource management in order to reach a sustainable use of the productive potential of the land and to halt the degradation of soils.* This is sought through establishing more economically and ecologically sustainable use, through support for the establishment of committees on inter and intra-village level able to decide on local natural resource management, and through the diffusion of new technologies, techniques and crops, in order to avoid overgrazing and soil erosion, and to maintain water resources and regenerate soil fertility.

- *Increase and diversify the economic activities of the rural population.* Rural, poverty, according to Danida is explained partly by the lack of diversity of cultivated crops and farmers' dependency on what is often one single rainfed foodcrop for domestic consumption. By cultivating different crops, raising domestic animals and through other income-generating activities, vulnerability is reduced. Therefore, new breeding techniques, cropping techniques and alternative income-generating activities are introduced.

- *Increase incomes of the rural population – esp. the women and the poor.* Through marketing of certain agricultural commodities and improving infrastructure and supporting certain forms of production, the programme provides extra incomes to the rural population.

- *Strengthen the organizations of the rural producer groups.* Through the programme the rural populations will create institutions capable of managing natural resources locally. The programme will also help organizations defend their interests, and help them marketing their produce and obtain agricultural inputs. Credits should be directed through these.

- *Improve the institutional framework so that the agricultural sector will be able to perform in a market economy.* Now that the state is no longer involved in marketing and regulating prices within agriculture, it must adjust to its new regulating and monitoring role. The state has a responsibility to allocate donor support and to plan where this support is most needed, and it needs support in order to perform these tasks optimally, in an efficient way assuring productivity and competitiveness.

These goals are pursued through four different programme components: Support to natural resource management projects and support to the national *Gestion de Terroirs* programme ; Support to agricultural credit schemes; Support to private sector support and finally through

institutional support to the sector, i.e. support to the Ministry of Agriculture, and to applied agricultural research. The Programme document furthermore states that, in the first months of intervention, a special effort will be made to develop indicators to measure the impact upon poverty in the intervention areas. How this is to be done remains to be seen.

The Danida programme support document claims that these activities will have positive effects on alleviating poverty, protecting the environment, on the living conditions of the women and on democracy. Poverty will be alleviated as the rural population in the intervention area is virtually all considered poor, credit will benefit the women, the environment will benefit from the sound management that will result from institutions set up and the construction of the famous stone bunds *diguettes*, a point we return to in Chapter 4. Democracy will be enhanced as the founding principles upon which these new institutions are built are democratic. Principles which will enable village institutions will to grow and become active institutional players in the process of decentralization.

Danish aid to natural resource management has so far mainly been concentrated in two projects, one in the Northern part of the country in the Seno and Yagha Province, based in the town of Dori; and the other the recently initiated Boulgou-project operating from the town of Tenkodogo in the southeastern part of the country.[14]

2.4.1 The PSB/DANIDA project in Dori

The DANIDA-project in Dori was, until 1996, executed by UNSO. It started in 1990 with the objective:

- to develop a natural resource management approach taking into account both private and common lands;

- to introduce improved and intensified systems of production;

- to introduce inter- and intra village institutions capable of assuring a management of natural resources that would lead to more sustainable use and the appeasement of conflicts among different user groups:

The project has, in collaboration with other donors and projects, developed an approach termed *'gestion de terroir'*, based on the assumption that the *gestion de terroir* is not only a village affair as the common grazing lands between the villages are used by several villages and by transhumant pastoralists. This has been done by creating so-called *Unités Agro-Pastorales* (UAPs) regrouping members from several often adjacent villages with traditional linkages. Within every UAP a number of *Comités de Gestion de Terroir (CGT)* from each village is designated, plus a number of *Comités d'action spécifique* (CAS), involved in undertaking activities supported by the project such as the construction of stone bunds, artisan production of

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[14]   As a matter of fact these projects are no longer projects. I recently contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to obtain a project document, and I was informed that they were no longer to be seen as projects, but as "Agricultural Sector Programme components".

soap etc. Recently, a third institution has been introduced, the *Comité Technique Villageois* (CTV), which is to assure coordination within each village. The project encourages and supports the creation of a *Schéma de Développement et de l'Amenagement du Terroir* within each UAP, in order to encourage the population to develop a long-term vision for the development of their territory, thereby assuring a de facto decentralization of land-use decisions to the village level. A very long list of supportive activities are part of the project, but the main activities remain the construction of stone bunds and the disbursement of credits for small-scale livestock-raising activities, and the approvision of water infrastructure in the form of wells or *bolis*, dug-out tanks where rainwater is gathered mainly for the watering of cattle. The problems of this project will be dealt with in Chapter 4.

2.4.2 The DANIDA Boulgou project

The other big Danish natural resource management project is situated in the province of Boulgou, in the southeast of the country. This project is situated in the town of Tenkodogo on the road to Togo. According to project documents (DANIDA 1997a), this project operates in a difficult context, as an Italian funded FAO-project operated in the region in the 80s, which apparently was, as they say in UN-language, 'not entirely successful'. This new project, like the Dori project, initially states that Burkina Faso has a problem: How to manage the carrying capacity of its ecological as well as human environment? (DANIDA 1995, p. 5) The project has got off to a slow start as it has been the objective to ensure the participation of the villages within the project zone. Therefore, a lot of diagnostic work has been undertaken in order to define more precisely what kind of activities were the priorities and in order to define who were to be the partners of the project. Although cultivation patterns, the ethnic and religious composition of the population, rainfall and infrastructure are markedly different, it seems that this project nevertheless ends up to a large extent carrying out the same activities as the Dori project. The project operates with four main principles:

- It has a participatory approach
- the support aims at village self-help (*'auto-promotion'*)
- the choice of zones of intervention is based on vegetation cover
- executing the different project tasks is open to a long list of service providers, subcontractors and entrepreneurs; (DANIDA, 1997a, p.3)

It has not, however, come up with concrete solutionsregarding how the project will ensure other points than point three. It is not substantiated in more concrete terms what is actually meant by the above. The participatory approach, which is no doubt an honest intention of the project management, has so far not been able to lead to the identification of project activities that are different from the ones initially stated in the earlier documents from the preparatory phase of the project. The many PRA exercises have not been able to define either why the self-reliance of the farmers should mean so much to them, despite the more obvious fact that submitting to some kind of dependency relation to the project seems more logical, hence the discussion of the ideas of Oliver de Sardan (1995). When trying to explain this, the authors of the project documents end up in clear tautologies:

"A ce grand principe (Gestion de terroirs) doit s'ajouter l'exigence
pour le projet d 'une démarche opérationnelle visant

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fondamentalement le renforcement progressif des capacités endogènes de la population éssentiellement rurale- à prendre en charge son propre développement'. (DANIDA, 1997a, p.3.)

In other words, indigenous capacities should be strengthened in order for people to be capable of taking charge of their own development. This statement is, to say the least, not easily transformed into concrete activities. Going further into the report, it is stated that the project supports the government policy of liberalizing markets and promoting private investments and reducing the role of the state (ibid.p.4) Furthermore it acts within the national policy of decentralization, because:

"L'approche du projet (qui) privilegie le dialogue et la negociation avec les populations, et qui vise avant tout la résponsabilisation des communautés rurales locales pour prendre en main la gestion de leur avenir, se situe dans le contexte global de la décentralisation au Burkina Faso. (ibid)

However, one searches in vain for studies of local power structures within the project document, and there are no concrete recommendations as to how dialogue with the local population is going to be translated into a de facto transfer of power to local levels.

It seems that both projects in fact make some rather drasticinitial implicit assumptions:

- that there are problems;
- that there is a consensus as to what the problems are;
- that everybody is willing to do something about it;
- that the project is operating in an institutional void;
- that the introduction of the necessary institutions will solve problems of social conflict over resources;
- that people's powerlessness can be overcome through empowerment and *'responsabilisation'*;
- that existing power structures will accept that newly introduced institutions gain influence;
- that imported soil and water conservation measures provide solutions for farmers.

We are, in other words, back to a rather rigid version of the "tool-perfecting " approach. There is virtually no mention of any kind of political dynamism in rural Burkina Faso: poverty is viewed within a completely powerless context, and it is to be alleviated though bringing forth a number of opportunities that these people apparently formerly were not aware of, regardless of any social constraints that they may succumb to. Furthermore, the institutional question, where the set-up of institutions is supposed to solve a series of serious resource allocation problems, seems to underestimate seriously the local political implications of resource competitions. The mere establishment of a series of institutions (with no juridical status, just an affiliation to an affluent project, important but not necessarily very legitimate or long-lasting) is seen as a panacea for resolution of resource conflicts that local institutions have worked with for years with more

or less success. The establishment of a rigid institutional code might as well lead to the exacerbation of resource conflicts as to the opposite, as the fluidity of the existing institutions opens for a certain negotiability, thereby avoiding open conflict. This, of course, might especially benefit the powerful, but at least considers local power structures.

The oblivion towards any kind of power relations and resource allocation mechanisms in rural Burkina Faso makes it rather dubious whether it is at all legitimate to state as bluntly as DANIDA does that their programme will have a positive impact upon their "cross-cutting issue" objectives, poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability support for women, democracy, as they seem to imply.

2.5 Potential partners of the DANIDA projects

The project documents stress the importance of establishing partnerships with local partners, not only within the government extension services, but also among NGOs, local organizations and private entrepreneurs. DANIDA projects are, naturally, very popular partners, because of their strong economic capacities. Therefore, other institutions are very eager to work with the projects. The most important partner is the government extension service, the CRPA *(Centre Régional de Promotion Agro-pastorale)*. Severe problems as to how to optimize these partnerships have, however, occurred, as CRPA in itself has practically no means to run their services apart from the funding they get through the PRSAP-project, which is basically a logistic support programme. A very 'uneven' partnership thus immediately emerges, where the project has to 'control' the CRPA, and make sure they get their money's worth.

Similar problems exist among the NGOs. Both in Dori and in Boulgou a number of NGOs operate, but most often either strictly with their own agenda without the ability to focus on what their agenda should be apart from promoting development. They operate without any form of coordination of their activities, and are mostly entirely dependent on external support to cover their salaries, logistics and activities. The projects have attempted to entrust certain activities to local NGOs, especially activities related to the training of villagers and project staff, but the NGOs have often lacked sufficient skills to direct these training activities. Or the training has been 'ideologically biased' as in the case where project staff in Dori was trained by the locally based NGO APESS, which has a very strong semi-religious ideological basis developed by their charismatic leader, Doctor Boubabar LY.

It has also been quite limited what kind of activities that have been possible to entrust to private entrepreneurs. Activities have included the hiring of trucks to transport stones for the construction of stone bunds or the supply of fuel for project vehicles from the local petrol station. Furthermore, of course, the mere presence of the projects has boosted the local economy in the sense that the DANIDA projects are among the largest employees in the towns where they operate, which is a very important influence.

In all three cases it is the impression that this has not been successful. It does not seem that the activities were enabled to run without significant prolonged input from DANIDA. Neither did DANIDA project activities become more cost effective through entrusting activities to others.

2.6 Summing up

Evaluations of the DANIDA-projects are ambiguous. DANIDA-evaluations generally recognize that great efforts have been made to build institutions, but on the other hand they accept that the overall impact, especially in the ecological sense, is very reduced (PNUD 1996, Danida 1997a). Furthermore it is recognized that a more clearly outlined pedagogic strategy in the training efforts is lacking. However, the evaluations are generally positive, and in no way question the premises on which the projects operate.

Evaluations do not mention local knowledge of the environment, or Burkinan farmers' own agricultural techniques and strategies. Although it is stated as a clear intention, there is a striking absence of any kind of reflection upon the positioning and strategies a "recipient group" might have facing an awesome "partner" like Danida. All mention of farmers' strategies towards poverty (cutting down trees, migrating, having more children) is condescendingly discarded as unsustainable, harmful, starting vicious circles of degradation. But admittedly these strategies are harmful aren't they? Well, the fact is that all development documents and plans content themselves with repeating the narratives causing the "crisis" in Burkina Faso, but none provide any more convincing evidence to why things should be like that. Is the environment degrading? They apparently do not need to prove this, it is so obvious to everybody. Or the other side of this question: Is development intervention reversing the degradation? No, not yet, so we need more of it (PNUD 1996).

But most importantly, Danida makes no mention, even in their swift account on "risks" (to project success) of political constraints or opposition to their activities. Project activities are apparently inserted into a void of both institutions, power and conflicting interests. But is Danida aware of these problems of local powers being constraints to development? Maybe so, but they see the problem as solved by extracting social problems from the political sphere, and recasting them as managerial or developmental.

The three following chapters will go more thoroughly into details of development initiatives like the two DANIDA projects. In the third chapter, I shall explore a special form in which criticism of development projects and programmes is made. It is a form of critique which is most often very pertinent and precise in pinpointing shortcomings and recommending perfections of certain methodologies. It is again a 'tool-refining' perspective on the critique of development initiatives, once again not calling into question the political dimension of development institutions. Furthermore, this tool-refining perspective has a tendency to revert to developmentalist normativism. In this critique I will not limit myself to the empiria of Dori and Boulgou, but will also draw upon other researchers who have studied different types of development institutions. In the fourth chapter I shall try to outline a more political approach to the analysis of development institutions. This is not just seeing the project 'within the framework of the national policy of decentralization', but as a contested arena of conflict over economic, social and symbolic resources. Looking at the project in this way suddenly produces new perspectives, because all of a sudden people 'participate' very actively trying to position themselves in order to benefit as much as possible from the externally driven intervention. Finally,, in Chapter five I shall return to the basic assumptions on which development is construed. Looking at these as special forms of discourse and tracing their genealogy, weighing them against the narratives and myths prevailing concerning causes and importances of certain features of Burkina Faso society and

natural resources, will constitute the final *coup de grace* to the development initiatives as I have experienced them in Burkina Faso. And I shall even irreverently not end with a chapter of 'recommendations'. Instead I will focus on what I see that development has nevertheless done, in the sense that it has created certain societal dynamics of its own, maybe not the anticipated ones, but maybe something not so bad after all.

Chapter 3. Tool-perfecting development research and its failure

In Chapter Two I listed a number of apparently common assumptions as to the necessity and relevance of development assistance for natural resource management in Burkina Faso. In this chapter I shall review important critical research within this field. My point is that much of this research, though thoroughly and critically carried out, fails at a critical point as the researchers resort to a normative acceptance of the relevance of the aid, which they,themselves, have shown to be so unsuccessful. My hope is to show the importance of insisting on a political dimension in development assistance, looking at development institutions as arenas of conflict over the means for development.. This political 'arena approach' will then be developed and illustrated empirically in Chapter Four.

In the following, I shall go through a number of different assessments of different types of aid to Burkina Faso. All texts have what I term a "tool-perfecting" objective. Development aid, it is claimed, has not been successful for a number of reasons, but should be altered through the application of new techniques developed in part by drawing upon experience from the past. There is room for significant improvement. More involvement of recipients, better targeting, setting more realistic goals, more thorough studies before carrying out things in an unknown setting etc. are seen as ways to improve aid performance.

The first, from the OECD is a critical assessment of aid to the Sahel in general. The OECD, in a summarizing essay, 'Finding problems to Suit the Solutions: Introduction to a Critical Analysis of Methods and Instruments of Aid to the Sahel' (OECD, 1996) tries to point to a number of central shortcomings in development aid to the Sahel.

The second, by Gabas *et al.* is an assessment of the effect of French aid to Burkina Faso. It tries to get beyond the "evaluation"-stage, listing a series of issues the authors consider not should be forgotten when looking at the effects of aid.

The remaining are all NGO studies, and have a more narrow focus. Maclure reflects upon certain NGOs working in the Namentenga Province, and highlights certain shortcomings of this NGO-work. Atampugre reflects on the institutional problems related to two projectswhich are undergoing a transfer from being executed by a foreign NGO to being taken over by a locally-created NGO. Finally, I refer to three other studies, which are revealing assessments of NGO performance.

These mentioned texts, I shall argue share a number of normative notions, despite their differences in scope and focus.

The notions that they share are the following:

- They all share a vision of a preferable kind of development being *sustainable*. Few people nowadays have no reservations about the concept of sustainability, admitting

the problems of operationalising political goals of sustainability in more concrete terms. However, when it comes to assessing development aid, the concept pops up again and again, not always intentionally, as a combined normativity and conditionality.

- Associated with the sustainability concept is the ideological idea that development aid should plan its own demise. The withering away of the development apparatus is still an objective, although it could very well be argued that things are going the opposite way.

- All texts see a related problem in the sense that aid tends to create *dependence*. Aid has often been hoped to help beneficiaries to become self-reliant, but it has often appeared that there was no realistic hope of this: the presence of the donor was *sine qua non* if the project activity was to continue. The way to tackle this problem, to assure popular participation and a feeling of ownership, has not yet emerged.

- Finally, they see Burkina Faso as being in a state of *crisis*, to which development is the solution. However, it has to be the right kind of development.

3.1 The OECD report

The OECD report (OECD, 1996) is a remarkably critical report on development assistance to the Sahel. It presents 1) an overview of weaknesses and failings that hinder aid effectiveness; 2) it tries to identify the reasons for these failings and 3) it details goals of aid in order to provide instruments of analysis in order to propose possible courses of action. As it is the most comprehensive account of the difficulties of administering aid to Sahel, I will summarize it at length before going into a discussion and critique of some of the preconceived notions on which it is based

1) Overview of the effectiveness of aid.

OECD puts forward two main conclusions regarding the aid effectiveness:

I. It claims that aid to the Sahel has had mixed results in terms of *impact*. Its main shortcomings include a failure to assure 'ownership'; it appears that 'punctual aid' has been the most successful, as in e.g. the installment of infrastructure (esp. communication), and to some extent also energy and water. On the other hand, institution building in order to assure the continuity of these activities has largely failed. It equally points to the fact that the private sector has not been very successfully addressed.

II. Secondly, the report points to shortcomings in the way aid has been *inconsistently and inefficiently directed*. The report points to the following issues:

- The aid is mainly *'donor driven'*, i.e. managed, conceptualized, appraised, implemented, evaluated, and of course paid for by donors.

- Aid is *offered rather than requested*. It is designed to fit donor demands rather than to fulfill a demand. Initiatives are taken by donors to face this, through trying to assure local involvement, but this leads to ambiguity of action, lack of sustainability and obstacles to the building of local institutions.

- Aid sometimes uses unsuitable and even counterproductive *instruments*. Institutional building initiatives mostly fail, and there is a preference for constructing parallel institutions, which are seen as particularly destructive.

- Goals are *too ambitious*, forecasts too optimistic and deadlines unrealistic. This is mainly because of lack of sufficient knowledge, underestimating the complex nature of recipient society. There is too little "learning capacity" by development institutions, the same mistakes are made again and again.

- There are *too many aid activities and they are badly coordinated*. Especially the lack of coordination, uneven distribution of intervention, too many seminars (this could however equally be seen as a sign of attempts to coordinate things.)

- The *dialogue between donors and recipients is tense*. Recipients feel that they are not listened to, donors treat them like crooks, insisting on having the final say when they finance. The result is that targets are boosted in order to reach a pleasant consensus.

Concluding, the report says that there is a considerable *inconsistency* in the way aid is given. However, the OECD insists that there is considerable scope for perfecting the way aid is given, which is a better alternative than the withdrawal of aid, a solution practised by certain donors. Inconsistency, however, remains. Donors promote development, but define the goals; Insist on participation but on the donors' terms; they keep setting unrealistic goals.

What are the reasons for these failures? When looking for the causes, it is first and foremost striking that there is *not too much haste when it comes to reforming inadequate donor practices*. Mistakes are repeated again and again. And poor performances are explained by the weak institutional capacity of the Sahelian countries. However, the report sympathetically notes that this blaming the recipient for his inability to receive the aid is somehow odd. Thirdly, the aid business is "rallied by catchwords", hence the focus is on participation, aid coordination, partnership and, more recently, ownership . However, these have been more successful as indicators of problems than as solutions to problems. As a matter of fact, it is claimed in the report that *there is an inverse relationship between the level of participation and the success rate of development aid*, the most successful being those dominated totally by the donors: building roads, fighting onchocerciasis etc.

2. Looking for causes of aid Failings.

The OECD report goes on to *a search for improved aid effectiveness*. As mentioned above, the report sees considerable scope for improvement in the way aid is given.. The search for improved aid effectiveness is concentrated on three issues:

1) looking at the methods for designing aid,
2) looking at partnership practices,
3) assessing results and risk management.

ad. 1.)
Methods in aid designing are, according to the report, "steeped in a culture of planning and strategising". Goals are set, finances set, resource allocations planned, reciprocal commitments made, etc. This definition of goals sometimes makes dialogue problematic. Northern partners have more long-term objectives, while Sahelians have very pressing and short term problems. Problems that emerge (lack of sanctions, nepotism, incompetence etc.) are always excused with a lack of resources (human or logistic). The goal can therefore always be attained by adding resources. The report suggests that the problem can be addressed through reversing the setting of goals, starting by identifying specific problems among recipients and defining the goals afterwards. This should guarantee a "real commitment". It is therefore impossible to define the goal more in detail as the outcomes of the interventions depend on lessons learned, behavioural changes, trial and error, successes and failures. This 'ascending initiative approach' reversing the top-down goal-setting relies much more on local institutions to play a larger part in implementation and formulation of objectives. The reader will notice a strong similarity with the approach of Rondinelli as sketched in Chapter One.

Furthermore, the report claims that the many *instruments* developed to assure sustainability in development aid end up becoming obstacles. An example is planning, which is a key element in local capacity-building efforts. The donors' efficiency ideal appears to be a strongly centralized and planned country, with a jungle of "plan cadres", NEAPs, SAP-plan etc. etc. Many examples equally show that a great deal of institutions are created with the sole objective of accommodating aid. The prevalence of instruments over problems has two consequences. Firstly, it makes "true partnership" difficult. Secondly, it creates a temptation to push for solutions that might not be very helpful, but will keep the aid instruments running.

The design chain of development projects does not foster the analysis of problems. Many actions are launched following negotiations over what the goals should be, which opens for preconceived solutions (often based on myths about the causes of the problems). This goes for grand programmes and grass-roots levels alike. It results in the striking feature that all rural NGOs basically do the same thing.
This is, according to the report, not because of a misreading of Sahelian reality. It is a problem of conceptualization, of going from
GOAL > INSTRUMENT > SOLUTION > PROBLEM
To
PROBLEM > SOLUTION > INSTRUMENT > GOAL.

Carrying out this more thorough definition of what the problem is is much more time consuming, and may delay action. And it requires a decentralization of decision-making power. And it is much more difficult if one cannot adapt a "package solution" but has to adapt each project to special local circumstances. The fact that this is not done results in the rather extraordinary fact that the same development medicine is prescribed worldwide, as long as it is the "Third World."

ad. 2.) Looking at partnership practices, the report asks the question of why aid does not simply respond to the demands of the recipient. This is apparently because of problems of linking recipients' development demands to donors' options and constraints. This again results in a situation where aid is not meeting a real demand, but is being supply-driven. Supply-driven aid is intended to be diminished through the establishment of "partnerships", but this does not actually change the problem.

The result is that aid increasingly becomes unrequited, with diminishing "contributions nationales". With no counterpart funding the use of aid becomes too casual, there is no *"responsabilisation"*. According to the report, the following failings are observed:

- Lack of reciprocity distorts aid value. This distorts sustainability. Reciprocity is the only way to assure this.

- Absence of reciprocity has made institutions assisted by aid into aid instruments. This is true among institution building projects and especially within Sahelian regional institutions (CILSS a.o.).

- reciprocal arrangements are the only signals by which demand can be identified, checked and ranked. This will at the same time reduce the number of aid programmes to the number "really necessary".

In Conclusion the report states that donors have become "shoppers" for structures that could accommodate projects, and no longer suppliers of aid, meeting a demand. Lack of reciprocity and "ownership" is the result.

The idea of a "real demand", however, according to the OECD calls for some serious questioning. The consequence of insisting on this is serious downscaling, less visibility of results and the massive abandonment of activities that have started to degenerate. This calls for a massive change in policy and a general consensus among the donors.

Moreover, the report suggests that counterpart financing might not always be a prerequisite, but should maybe only be insisted upon when "ownership" is required. For instance, it is OK to build a road without reciprocity, local involvement, sustainability demands, etc. In the case of institutional building, however, it is seen as very problematic.

Finally, concerning partnership practices, knowledge transfers to the Sahel have not been successful, probably because experts have lacked sufficient knowledge of Sahelian realities. Technology transfer has been especially problematic. At the heart of this problem is the question of intermediaries. The internal clock of the foreign expert often runs too fast, and his/her urge to rush things in order to see results before the end of the contract often makes the activity "donor driven" to an excessive degree. The problem is that local intermediaries, that could solve this problem (like for instance small NGOs) are eager to protect themselves against risks, thus blurring their role as conveyors of development demand. The second problem is that local intermediaries capable of playing this role (translating different discourses) are in short supply, and once again aid questions about the aid process end up overshadowing development questions.

ad 3. Assessment of results and risk management.

Within this third problem area, there is an initial dilemma within the donors' demand for immediate and visible results. The success of an aid project is measured by referring to the objectives in the project document, comparing actual results with the objectives stated. Visible and measurable evidence is therefore of great importance. However, it is increasingly evident that even if these measurable targets are met, the overall goals may be far from accomplished. A reconsideration of the evaluation process is probably necessary. This leads again to the dilemma of donor control vs. recipient ownership. Donors must ensure maximum control of the development activities. This is done by creating recipient institutions as "short circuits" thus guaranteeing tangible results. This however undermines the other objective of developing local capacities. Short circuits become projects carrying their own institutional mechanisms, through technical and financial control, parallel to national institutions. Programme aid as well shows other examples of short circuits. Loaded as it is with conditionalities to limit imponderables, it forms a circuit based not on autonomy, but on the precise predictability of partner behaviour.

Aid to the Sahel is thus, geared to achieve maximum predictability and control in an environment, which is characterized by extreme unpredictability. This often leads to ruptures in participation. All this is, however, not said by the OECD so that donors forget about control, as it is accepted that control is imperative as some national institutions are unable to manage aid funds in a reasonable manner. It does, however, de-responsibilise the recipients, further deteriorating relations between the two partners, and the result of these control mechanisms is the elimination of local influence. In this case, a possible solution would be to accept that donors control projects from start to finish. But this is not "sustainable", there is no longer any institution building component.

Evaluations play a central role here. Evaluations tend to make projects more cautious as to experiments, to avoid any risks and instead make them focus on "visible" actions, so that the project has something it can show the evaluation committee. Larger joint evaluations ought to be initiated to assess longer-term effects, and which permit mistakes.

C. Isolating goals and differentiating between instruments.

The report finally sets up a number of propositions concerning how to better target the aid into areas of priority: How do we improve aid performance, apart from lowering the probably too high expectations that have prevailed?
First of all, the report says, we define what the main goals have been so far : Crisis prevention and management, capacity building, the provision of timely aid and the development of strategies and innovations.

1. Managing and preventing crisis.

Crisis prevention can take many forms, from emergency aid, to rendering systems more sustainable, like agricultural aid or even structural adjustment programmes. The programmes may be run entirely by donors, and it might even be argued that this is acceptable in cases where the overall objective and the problem solved in the longer term is so advantageous that the fact that the Sahelian country has not had any "ownership" may be considered less important. Health

programmes could be included in this category, or emergency relief in case of acute crisis. The problem is, however, that at a certain point the crisis becomes permanent, and everything becomes "crisis-oriented". The report states that a future course should be to more clearly identify which areas deserve the crisis label. Obvious areas are natural resource degradation, (a point which is not substantiated) health and food security. Donors need, however, to be more pragmatic, to pose fewer conditions and to be more contractual in their approach.

2. Building capacities.

The problem is that when dealing with crisis, the goal is prioritized over the process, and it is pursued through a given project. The goal-based approach has often undermined the national institutional capacity to address the problem once the project is over. A number of instruments to effectively build these capacities have been proposed: shared analysis of problems, reciprocal arrangements, accepting higher levels of risk, making goals more flexible etc. These instruments are, however, hard to integrate in donors' administrative procedures.

3. Providing timely and targeted aid.

Aid is often very punctual stating a clear objective: build a road, construct this, inform those, train these etc. The project has been the normal institution to deal with these kinds of activities. However, at times the goals of such projects have been confused, (build capacity, alleviate poverty, halt degradation, improve living standards), and results become more opaque as well. Many opaque goals have been treated as if they were clear project goals. Especially within capacity building projects, this has been a problem.

4. Developing strategies and innovations.

Aid agencies do all the footwork when defining what kind of aid is to be delivered. The problem is that as things are, they are not knowledgeable enough to understand the complex systems of production and power in the Sahel to make pertinent interventions. Therefore, interventions become based more on preconceived notions than empirical facts.

D. Conclusion: Why now and why the Sahel?

According to the OECD report, the reasons given above are grounds for extensive changes in the way aid is directed to the Sahelian countries. However, it is often stated that donors are unable to drastically to reform their aid disbursement practices. This is erroneous, as they have done this many times in the past. This time, where skepticism is at a maximum, a reassessment of the overall assistance is required, and must be viewed as an opportunity. Lessons learned show that aid "must stay in touch with a finely-tuned understanding of the dynamics of Sahelian society". External partners need to constantly reassess their standpoints and policies. Finally, the report concludes that OECD countries can still aim at ambitious goals with limited budgets, if they choose well-adapted methods and instruments.

3.1.1 Discussion And Critique Of The OECD Report

The OECD report is very critical and concise, pointing to certain very central problems in development aid. The strange thing is that it is nevertheless caught up within a developmentalist discourse, and a sort of developmental political correctness which prohibits the addressing of what I see as the most central problems in development aid to the Sahel, namely the failure to treat political problems as political and not technical.

Furthermore it is a illustration of what happens if one does not adopt an "actor-oriented approach" based on methodological individualism. The report starts to stipulate what donors, nations, states, recipients and other ill-defined groups "ought" to do in order to improve the quality of aid, thus resorting to normative ideas and over-looking that actors maybe prefer to pursue their own projects. In addition to this, there is no serious questioning of whether the premises of the critique as it is listed above are maybe in themselves wrong. The idea of administering aid for development is beyond discussion. The report is, thus, an example of a "tool-perfecting" approach to development critique, not seriously questioning the premises onto which aid is dispensed, and at the same time taking a very technocratic and basically apolitical stand in pinpointing the shortcomings of aid. As mentioned, many of the recommendations are quite similar to those outlined in Rondinellis "adaptive approach" (cf. Chapter 1).

Having said this, the report nevertheless points to some very central problems in development assistance, especially as it highlights the problems of some of the central notions on which the development assistance is based, namely capacity building, participation and sustainability.

In the following I shall go through the different points in the report, in order to clarify my criticisms. I see certain problems in the search for aid effectiveness. First of all, it is an inadequate analysis of the problem of assuring commitment. Recipient groups are quick to understand which types of aid they can realistically obtain, and therefore position themselves accordingly, by requesting the type of aid whichthey are likely to get. The "real commitment" which should be assured by reversing the aid design procedure is therefore likely to reflect some of the same types problems of pragmatism and adaptations to the logics of the aid business. But other problems occur. What is meant by "real commitment"? And what is "true partnership"? Is it opposed to false partnership or patron-client relationships? A long anthropological tradition devoted to the analysis of systems of gift-giving, starting with Mauss (for recent contributions see Laurent 1996; Olivier de Sardan 1996) stresses the importance of reciprocity when interchanging aid and gifts. But these more elaborate thoughts about donor-recipient relations are virtually absent today, when "partnerships" are created between extremely affluent donors with, even for insiders, at times very odd economic management procedures on the one hand and very destitute local institutions on the other. It seems that this lack of reciprocity and conditionality might in fact erode the legitimacy of the partnerships, in the sense that calling it anything other than a "patron-client" relation might confuse the Southern partners. On the other hand, accepting these unequal terms might be more productive in the long run, as well as accepting that "sustainability" is an ideological donor conditionality rather than a realistic, shared vision which everyone has a clear idea about.

The discussion of partnership practices, is not critical enough, and it seriously underestimates the social processes underway in Sahelian society by virtue of the mere presence of aid. The question

of intermediaries deserves more attention than given here. When, as the report rightly notices, all NGOs do the same, it is not only because of compromises over preconceived notions, but also because local NGOs deliberately adapt a certain development discourse, and engage in activities likely to attract the attention of funding agencies. The question of how these processes are negotiated and the question of "development brokerage" (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 1993; Blundo, 1995), i.e. the modes of intermediacy between donors and target groups, which have become an important business for certain new rural elites with experience of the rhetoric of development within the different camps, is not treated.

Regarding the assessment of results, the report portrays the donors as being obsessed with control, thus destroying relations between donors and recipients. One might argue the opposite, that "he who pays the piper calls the tune" on the one hand and more seriously, that this control is unfortunately needed as recipients, especially at higher levels, have earned a not always undeserved reputation for embezzling and corruption, making very strict procedures necessary. The report is "politically correct" mainly blaming donors, who are in fact often very slow to crack down on recipients that do not follow procedures as they were agreed upon.

There is an interesting contradiction within the problem of control as it is explained in the report. The report is very right to point to the fact that donors in fact demand a degree of control and "over-planning", that they would never get away with in the Northern world. Funnily enough this is contradictory in two senses. It is contrary to the discourse of structural Adjustment, emphasizing that everything can be left to the optimally regulatory automatic pilot of the free market. But it is equally contrary to the discourse of modern management, emphasizing decentralization of decision-making procedures, construction of "corporate cultures" etc. (Tendler, 1997)

In the third section of the paper, the setting up of propositions for the improved targeting of the aid is constructive, but equallysomewhat problematic. There is an initial problem in establishing a "crisis perspective". With this point of departure it is too easy to define a more or less permanent crisis, as the report itself also states (But does anyway). Again the political dimension of the aid is underestimated; emergency aid is even more than "normal aid" a political weapon, as the emergency is most often caused by political unrest. Defining natural resource degradation, health and food security as special crisis areas seems a bit rash, and may result in hasty and ill-conceived solutions to issues that might not be seen as any special crisis by the recipient groups. Especially within natural resource management what has frequently been termed as crisis, i.e. the unsustainable use of resources, in fact often refers merely to a series of problems that rural populations are seen as facing. Treating it as a crisis that needs to be addressed or reversed therefore often produces the wrong solutions to problems that were never conceived of as such.

Likewise, the capacity-building discussion needs to address much more profound problems with development aid. It is clear that capacity building has often, as the report itself states, been very donor driven. Institution building efforts have mainly been creations of institutions through which aid could be channelled, or the creation of planning institutions that mainly reflected normative donor assumptions about what would be beneficial. Serious problems with the implementation of these plans have however rendered the end results very meagre (Speirs & Marcussen 1998). Even within a "tool-refining"-framework it seems fair to say that capacity building to a large degree rest upon a belief in a process of knowledge transfers from donors to recipients. There is

a clear tendency to see the capacity building problem as a problem of certain social actors lacking the abilities to undertake development. The question is whether this is an appropriate way of looking at things. Instead of looking at what people do, the focus is on what they ought to do. Instead of looking at what they know, the focus is on what they do not know.

Furthermore, capacity is often seen as a very unpolitical issue as well. When people do not do things in this or that way, it might be because they will get into trouble if they do, not because they lack the knowledge. Capacity is too often looked upon as merely a technical issue, not one implying power relations.

In an attempt to put forward suggestions as to how to provide "timely aid", the report criticized the fact that aid was very "punctual". This is very true, and donors now tend to go in the other direction: they downsize punctual aid, as they see this as uncoordinated islands , that are not sustainable. The focus is now more than ever on "sustainable human development," "capacity-building", "poverty alleviation", "environmental protection", "programme approach", all issues that are extremely difficult to translate into measurable activities, and whose meaning is vehemently contested once it is translated into concrete activity. The report is therefore correct when it states that many nebulous goals are treated as if they were clear objectives. Very true, but the problem is more serious than that, as development discourse shapes the way development is conceived in a much more profound way. Preconceived notions are not just at the basis of how activities are planned, but are decisive in the way that we are at all able to think of social change in Africa. It has become virtually impossible to think of any issue within rural Burkina Faso as anything which is not a problem that some kind of development has to address. It is not just a question of explaining, as V.S. Naipaul does; "When you lack the means, you compensate with beautiful declarations" (Naipaul, 1983).

It is obvious to compare the OECD-study with a study, they carried out on the future of the Sahel in 1988 (OECD, 1988). Which trends have changed, where has the focus moved, or is it still the same agenda? The 1988 study, which is not an aid assessment, stresses even more than current documents that the Sahel is in a situation of crisis. It focuses especially on agriculture, livestock and natural resource management, and it is especially interesting to analyse, what they saw as the main causes of this crisis, and how they assessed the different possibilities of addressing them.

In explaining the environmental problems, the 1988 report is very crude in stating subsequently challenged orthodoxies about the distorted equilibrium of the Sahelian environment, the carrying capacity that has been exceeded (citing a World Bank report stating that in certain dry areas of the Sahel, where the carrying capacity of the land is at 0,3 human being per Km^2, whereas the population at that time is now at 2,0), the overstocking, and the vicious circles in agriculture due to the disappearances of fallows. It states rather bluntly that more than 10 million people are affected by erosion.

Another feature that the future study mentions is the disintegration of the rural Sahelian society, due to massive migration and alienation from traditional values. This threat has not been evoked that often since.

The 1988 report shows a subsequently moderated optimism regarding what they conceive of as "genuine farmers' associations", local NGOs and civil society, an optimism which characterized

the 80s. The urban parallel to this optimism comes from "the informal sector", which is also seen as especially dynamic.

What is interesting is that the report also points to the lack of linkages between the sectors as a factor exacerbating to the crisis. This argument has been virtually forgotten. It is not stressed that multipartism, the great panacea of the nineties, should be a *sine qua non* of development. Development and democracy are not linked to the extent that they became later. Last but not least, sustainability is not the buzzword it later became. On the other hand there is a lot of mentioning of dependency and maginalization on the world markets.

In short, we see a tendency towards more emphasis on ideological notions based on normative ideas about democracy, effective management, good governance and sustainability, and away from explanations based on geophysical and geopolitical factors like demography, climate and world conjunctures.

3.2 Gabas *et al.*

Gabas *et al.* (1997) have made a specific study of the effectiveness of French aid to Burkina Faso. This document is somewhat less accessible, and not as clear in its presentation of its findings and recommendations as the OECD paper. It states as its objective that it intends to search for answers to the rarely answered question concerning why African states have not been able to take advantage of the aid, or ensure growth etc. The Gabas *et al.*- report endeavours to study the norms, procedures and institutional structures that determine the effectiveness of aid. It tries to pinpoint factors that enable governments to identify, plan, supervise, coordinate and assess aid programmes and projects. The document is, however, rather difficult to analyse more carefully as it states a long list of objectives, but does not succeed in following up on them. It claims not to focus on the donor, but on the recipient, in all its diversity, and delves into donor-recipient relations. It stresses the heterogeneity of the actors involved, the donors, the recipients and the "executioners". Nevertheless, this heterogeneity is not reflected in the analysis, which seems to suffer from methodological simplifications, and a lumping together of "interests" to certain institutions, which ought to be further disaggregated in the analysis. Neither does it stick to the promise of not focusing on the donor. Furthermore the report becomes normative in the sense that it resorts to dichotomies like "wanted/unwanted effects, positive and negative effects", etc.

The report outlines a number of *effectiveness criteria* for development aid. The emphasis is on the following four points:

1) the fulfilment of the objectives, i.e.

- the extent of fulfilment of direct stated objectives (yields increases, km. of road built etc.);
- the fulfilment of implicit objectives, objectives too general to be addressed in the report (but which nevertheless often are!) i.e. growth, development, political support;
- the satisfaction of emerging objectives;
- the realisation of indirect effects. (not clear what is meant by this);

- learning effects observed through the durability of the results and the sustainability of the activity.

The report furthermore calls for a scrutiny of *2) adverse effects*:

- incentive effects, e.g. price drops in scarce products, resulting in decreased production and increased imports. Increase in labour supply due to job creation, disruption of labour market (Was there ever an equilibrium?);
- local activity substitution, when the opposite was the intention;
- effects of dependence on assistance. It often poses problems for the self-perpetuation of activities if there is a huge projects with jobs and logistics running them.

The report states looking at *3) Lateral effects*:

- Effects on variables other than goal-variables.
- effects resulting from the fungibility of aid. This implies comparison between projects/programmes that receive aid and public outlays that don't.

And finally, it examines *4) costs of projects.*

- estimated costs;
- cost overruns compared with estimates;
- deadline overruns and their costs;
- balance of the costs of adverse effects and negative lateral effects.

These are indeed all very interesting points to look into, but instead of elaborating on them, the report merely lists tham and goes on to discuss:

3.2.1 The Causes Of Effectiveness/ineffectiveness

The report hereafter goes into looking at the causes of effectiveness in development aid.
Causes of eff/ineff. are to be pursued iteratively, as unexpected outcomes of aid are to be expected. Causes may be

- *The extent of project ownership.* Does an approach exist that incorporates aid not as an end in itself, but as a means for the recipient state to manage the project?
- *Relations between recipients and donors.* Is it supply or demand driven? Is there a constructive dialogue? Or is there an atmosphere of mutual recrimination. Are donor conditionalities felt as overtly harsh.
- *The cost of uncoordinated actions.* Demands by donors sometimes prevent governments from finding their own way of doing their work. Accompanying missions and living up to donor reporting procedures canplace a heavy strain on government work.
- *The quality of supervision and assessment by the sector's players.* Project success depends on their ability to adjust to change and learn from mistakes. This involves deciding which criteria mean that one project rather than the other is able to do this.

- The behaviour of 'clients'. States are usually seen as the main culprits of aid fiascoes. The Burkina Faso experience might be used to nuance this picture, to include certain donors and NGOs.

I shall not go into a more thorough assessment of the remarks the report makes on the different components of French aid, as I am not sufficiently familiar with the details of this programme to judge whether their assessments are pertinent.

It seems to me, however, that the assessment is built on a set of very normative notions related to aid, which lead to a series of superficial assumptions about the mechanisms of relations between donors and recipients, as if everybody had a common goal - development - that everybody ought to strive for. Institutions and even "the state" are attributed interests, as if they were social actors with clear agency. And these interests are formulated as being clearly in line with the overall development objectives of the French cooperation programme. This is translated into a series of problematic methodological statements that merit attention, as they highlight how the development discourse sets the agenda for the way the French team is able to analyse their findings. There is very little reflection concerning the interpretation of the report's findings. Take, for instance, the following quotation:

> *The pertinence and sincerity of the remarks made by interviewees was in no way distorted by the fact that they were asked their views about French aid by non-Burkinan team members. In fact, it was often noted that the presence of a Burkinan in interviews with Government officials hampered discussions. Using Burkinan researchers for surveys of recipients' opinions does not, in itself, necessarily produce truer results than those obtained and analyzed here.* (p.42)

The problem with the above quotation is that there is not a true answer, or degrees of truth in what respondents answer to questions related to aid. In that sense it is not correct that the pertinence and sincerity was in no way distorted. It seems essential to recognize that any answer in such a situation must be analyzed carefully taking into account that the researcher is a potential ally in the respondents struggle to remain within the aid sector. It is thus a simplification to say that it is better or worse to have a Burkinan. The answers will vary accordingly.

Or take a quotation like the following. When evaluating training it is stated that:

> *"Positive effects on the training and provision of mechanics-blacksmiths can be seen in the intermediate mechanization project. The same holds true for the PAFI project, where the Burkinans interviewed expressed their appreciation for the in-service training."*
> *(p. 53, op.cit.)*

Show me an interviewee, being interviewed by the donor who will not claim that yes, the project has been very helpful! The above might be a valid conclusion, but the way it is put forward is simply not convincing enough.

Other examples from the report witness the unreflected acceptance of certain institutional procedures, not attempting a more thorough analysis of what is actually happening:

> *(..) relations with donors are becoming institutionalized through frequent meetings, which increase the number of opportunities in during which the Burkinan party can show its proposal capacity and express its goals and ideas (p.51).*

The problem is whether this is not what one could also call a seemingly endless series of seminars held in Ouagadougou, where discussion is more or less unfathomable, as debate is tied to a certain technocratic development discourse making it virtually impossible to address crucial issues of power and politics. In that sense 'showing capacity' is more submission to certain narratives and rationalities, and kowtowing to donor conditionalities by paying lip service to developmentalist orthodoxies.

The report continues, asking *has the French aid fulfilled its goals?* The pages on the effectiveness of French aid simply do not to a sufficient degree answer the question posed at the beginning of the article, it does not follow the different points as they were listed in the beginning, where different criteria for effectiveness were listed. They point to the fact that certain sectors (sector however not explicitly defined but implicitly assumed as an analytical category) have received more attention, especially the cotton business, and that French aid has been rather successful in this regard.

Concluding, the article restates a number of the questions it began by posing as essential, but they remain unanswered. It points to five crucial points that are seemingly important as recommendations:

- The quality of technical assistance. There is an increasing awareness of the need for proficient technical assistance and the ability of these players to 'understand local concerns.'

- The quality of coordination. This is a fundamental issue when looking at aid effectiveness, and there is considerable room for improvement.

- The clarity of well-defined, circumscribed goals. These are to be shared by projects and beneficiaries.

- Communication. There is not enough awareness of cooperative activities. Communication should be improved.

- Finally the report points to the necessity of subsequent assessment, i.e. iterative considerations as to where projects are going. And lastly it questions whether aid is planning its own demise. I would say that at the moment it is not.

These are however somehow meagre conclusions that I think are so commonplace that hardly anyone would disagree with them. And there is no analysis of all the points put forward at the

beginning of the article concerning ratchet effects, adverse effects, lateral effects, etc., only very simplistic evaluations of certain French projects seen as not so bad after all, given the many players and partners involved.

It is strange to read a report by some of the best and most experienced French researchers, which is so uncritical of the political implications of the French development aid. It seems that part of the explanation can be found in the fact that the article is a bad summary of a larger report, and that the translation into English is quite poor as well. Parts of the report will be treated later: one of the team members has written a very interesting article about NGO-assistance.

My *main critique* focuses on the following:

In dealing with aid effectiveness, the report has some rather unsatisfactory conclusions about the importance of assuring "ownership" by the recipients of the aid. Strangely, as we saw in the former example from the OECD, the projects that worked best had in fact been the ones where local involvement and contribution had been minimal. "Ownership" is seen as the appropriation of the project by the recipients, that they accept it as "their own", are willing to invest their own resources in it etc. But this, it seems, is not the way projects are viewed. A project is a means for a lot of different actors to get access to a range of different resources, and "ownership" is not a fruitful way to look at the way projects are appropriated. Assuring the continued financing and seizing control of resource flows seems more important in this respect.

Neither does it seem fruitful to look at donor-recipient relations within a simple dichotomy of trust/distrust, dialogue/recrimination, supply driven/demand driven etc. Within these relationships, what Giddens calls "double hermeneutics" prevail, and these social processes should not be reduced to simplifications. For instance let us take the case of "supply or demand driven" aid. Demands are made according to what it is possible to obtain. And supply is not created within areas where demand is already met through the mobilization of local resources. Both demand and supply are shaped by a lot of other factors than what "recipients" immediately request etc.

Finally, although the report states that it is important to disaggregate the different donors and recipients, the state is seen as a homogenous entity, having overall societal objectives to pursue. This is contrary to a more realistic view of the state, seeing it as the central arena for primitive accumulation and conflicts over power, closely connected in an African context with the ability to accumulate capital.

We are, thus, once again back to a view of aid as mainly technical assistance, not involving politics, except when it "goes wrong", becomes politicised, and development all of a sudden is in danger, aid is reduced to dichotomies, seen as "successful" or "unsuccessful", "effective" or "ineffective", and a lot of normative parameters are thus attached in order to explain this, whether it is "participatory", "sustainable", "planning it's own demise", "effective" or whatever. Again, this is the "tool-perfecting" approach to development assistance, the recasting of political issues as technicalities.

3.3 NGO-aid in Burkina Faso

The next research that will be dealt with here concerns assessments of work done by NGOs in Burkina Faso. Edwards & Hulme (1995) refer to two main beliefs that have largely facilitated the explosion of development NGOs operating. First, the belief that the market economy and private initiative are the most effective instruments for achieving economic growth. Secondly, the belief that NGOs constitute an important element when wanting to "democratize" societies, hence assuring transparency, human rights, participation etc. in the attempts to introduce new players within the field of development. In a sense they have been synonymous with the notion of "civil society". By means of a remarkable instrumentalisation of an old concept, the strengthening of civil society, support to NGOs has been seen by a wide range of donors - Northern NGOs and the World Bank alike, as a means to achieve a more sustainable and democratic development.

It is obvious that the first belief is based upon some rather simple assumptions about markets and states as mutually exclusive. The less state you have, the more market and the more "civil society". The result is that you sack the people within the state apparatus and then expect markets to "fill in" the voids that occur. The second belief is also based on a rather simplistic assumption, namely that a weakened state and alternative ways of financing development assistance are likely to be able to reduce corruption and make things more "democratic". As discussed elsewhere, the results in Burkina Faso tend to be quite the contrary.

It is interesting to note that these two beliefs are shared by left and right alike in a Euro-American context, among "progressive" NGOs and the "right wing" Bretton-Woods institutions. These two beliefs are the cornerstones of the ideology of the structural adjustment programme applied in Burkina Faso, although they are coupled, as mentioned above, with the somehow ideologically contradictory demand for extensive initiatives to establish planning at all levels of society.

After an initial period of extreme optimism in the eighties (Belloncle 1980, Pradervandt 1989, OECD 1988), skepticism has grown as to the possibilities of expecting NGOs to be able to address poverty alleviation issues, and reach more remote "target groups". Issues like the lack of coordination, lack of common grounds for assessing the results, lack of significance (small is indeed beautiful, but at times it is too insignificant to make a difference), have been highlighted. An idea that NGOs *per se* should be less corrupt and embezzlement-prone than the state has also, in certain cases, needed revision.

There is, thus, a "new wave" of more critical assessments of NGO-work, of which the ones below deal with rural Burkina Faso, and therefore have special interest. It is my argument that most of them, though critical, tend to resort to the same normativism that they set out to banish.

3.3.1 Maclure

The first case is a study by Maclure (1995) conducted in the late eighties and the early nineties in the province of Namentenga. The three NGOs are *Le Plan de Parrainage International de Boulsa* with 16 extension agents in the area, the *Projet de Santé Maternelle et Infantile*, funded by Catholic Relief Service with a field staff of ten and finally *L'Association du Développement de Kaya*, financed primarily by Dutch and German Catholic Churches and with a permanent staff of eight.

Maclure,s study is based on extensive fieldwork in four villages in the Namentenga province, where one or more of the three foreign NGOs had been active for a minimum of five years. The evidence is based on what he terms "naturalistic methods of inquiry", a method he does not, however, reveal much about. It involved participant observation and extensive informal interviewing with villagers and NGO staff. Furthermore, it involved a more systematic household census and a number of semistructured interviews.

The argument of Maclures study is that these three foreign-funded NGOs in Burkina Faso and their "animation rurale" efforts *tend to lead, not to self-reliance and to a situation where people take "their future in their own hands", which is the explicit goal, but rather to a situation where patron-client relationships between villagers and donors are enhanced.* It reveals that the overall impression among villagers of development interventions is generally very positive, especially if the development intervention includes important components of logistic support. But the granting of support tends to reinforce dependency, and to stress the importance of establishing "vertical"connections within the aid system in order to assure the continuity of relations between village society and donors, thus assuring sustained aid. The study furthermore seriously questions the notion that structural inequities underlying rural poverty can be alleviated through the acquisition of new knowledge, organization and increased awareness, as it is implicitly assumed in the "Animation rurale" approach.

NGOs working in Africa face a number of problems according to Maclure. First of all, they are, along with their increased importance in replacing state agencies, increasingly dependent on finance from abroad, with the conditionalities that this implies. Secondly, facing this need for increased professionalism, they tend to become bureaucratized, which may diminish their grass-roots orientation. This, according to Maclure, necessitates a re-evaluation of the ability of the NGOs to "strengthen civil society" and the democratization processes, as there is a tendency to overestimate the ability and the interest of NGOs to influence socio-economic set-ups and power structures in rural Africa.

The boosting of people's knowledge through initiatives like *"animation rurale"* has done little to enhance the villages' capacity to collectively and independently manage community development projects. This is hardly surprising, as socio-economic structures are in no way challenged through the approach. Maclure, however, claims that it has led to the emergence of patron-client relationships between the recipient communities and the donor NGOs. This leads him to pose two questions:

- Why does relatively small-scale development intervention so often confound the intentions of itsproponents by leading to - or exacerbating - relations of dependency?

- What implications does this externally induced contradiction have for *"animation rurale"* programmes, specifically aiming at reducing dependency?

In the accounts from Namentenga, where the answers to these questions are sought, it is shown that logistical support in connection with the *animation rurale* programmes was generally received with great enthusiasm by villagers, and they in no way seemed to worry about the fact that there was no reciprocity in the way logistics were donated. From the NGO-administration, there was however an idea that this logistic support was second to the actual content of the

development programmes, namely the training components. These were, however, much less successful, literacy skills were not used after the training and were forgotten; improved stoves were abandoned after having been introduced, agricultural equipment was not used, and a return to old techniques was observed, etc.

This can to some extent be attributed to the fact that training is often done in a pedantic and not very pedagogic manner, turning villagers into passive recipients of knowledge transfers, in a way that has little to do with local knowledge transfer systems, or with more effective knowledge transfer systems known in the West, which stress "situated learning" etc.

Furthermore, Maclure claimes that it is erroneous to assume that new skills transmitted to certain villagers should automatically be transferred to the rest of the population. And, finally, it appears that people tend to forget what they have learned at these training sessions. More seriously, Maclure also claims that the diffusion of new knowledge may serve as a "cultural invasion", leading to the erosion of existing local knowledge and the neglect of indigenous know-how and modes of behaviour. In short, there is a danger that *animation rurale* leads to a dismissal of local knowledge and faith in local resources, precisely the opposite of its initial objective.

Among the reasons for this were that some of the animateurs were at the same time project managers. There was, thus, an incentive for them to assure accountability and not delegating responsibilities to the villagers, but to monopolize accounts etc. The *animateur*, in this way deprived the villagers of the possibility of testing their new knowledge by managing their projects themselves.

Maclure is, however, sympathetically cautious of blaming the extension workers for the shortcomings of the *animation rurale* efforts, drawing attention to the fact that these agents are obliged to manoeuvre within a local arena of conflict and power struggles where one has to be careful as an outsider when taking sides. Furthermore, the fact that there is an enormous social difference between the local people and the animateur, even if his/her salary is low, leads to the isolation of the animateur vis-a-vis the local population. The "*animation rurale*" thus becomes a "transfer point of power and knowledge", where the power differential leads to patron-client relationships between the rural population and the outside agencies.

It is therefore unavoidable, according to Maclure, that dependency becomes a consequence of *animation rurale,* especially given the current situation where the Burkinan peasantry is facing increased marginalization and internal stratification.

Maclure thus concludes that it is erroneous to assume that self-reliance and self-sufficiency should be goals of external development assistance. Likewise, it is not realistic to envisage that the poor be able to "determine their own destinies" without external assistance. Instead it seems more fruitful to explore ways to improve systems of dependency, so that they become systems of interdependency. Maclure is, however, not very clear as to how this is going to happen but seems content with suggesting that more durable associations be made, not just at village level, but also between villages and that relations between donor agencies and the villages be made on more equitable basis. This should be done through "increasingly engaging representative segments of the rural poor" in planning, decision making etc. On a concrete level, this means cost-sharing and communal contributions to infrastructure etc, more participation in the outlining of what should be the aims and contents of education, etc. The NGOs should come to grips with

their own lines of authority, decision making and accountability, in order to assure that their programmes remain vested in their own agencies, enabling them to generate relations of genuine parity.

3.3.1.1 Critique

Maclure provides a very needed contribution to a critique of the work of NGOs in Sahelian societies. My concern with his work is that, while being sharp in his criticism, his suggestions for improvement tend to end up risking being repetitions of past errors. I shall briefly outline what I see as the reasons for this.

First of all he is not very thorough in his definition of the different concepts he is operating with. He operates with notions like "dependency", which has led to "patron-client relationships", but fails to provide more exhaustive explanations as to what he means by these notions, except that this is unfortunate. Dependency is seen as the opposite of "self-reliance", one of the primary goals of the *"animation rurale"*, the central theme of the programmes that are the focus of Maclures analysis. He then convincingly points to the fact that it might be erroneous to talk of self-reliance as a development goal *per se*, but fails to analyse the concept of self-reliance more thoroughly. In whose interest is "self-reliance"? Self-reliance seems to be a very moral and ideological notion, which one may find appealing, but should maybe be cautious in imposing on others. It seems quite logical for marginalized rural populations to try to do the direct opposite. There seems to be no incentive to try to avoid making outside logistical support a perennial thing, especially as this support is often so costly that the local acquisition of such is considered prohibitive. And it is not only the rural populations that have an interest in the perennity of, for instance, NGO activities. NGOs constitute a high-wage area for educated "animateurs", and even foreign consultants may have an interest in sustaining the activities of an NGO in order not to spoil their own careers. The remarkable lack of self-criticism within the NGO-movement in Burkina Faso, purporting to uphold an image of a non-antagonistic framework for NGO-work, is revelatory in this respect.

Maclure swiftly touches upon this when saying that the *"animation rurale"* becomes a "transfer point of power and knowledge". But he fails to go into a more detailed analysis of how the NGO becomes an arena for these power transfers.

Maclure says that the idea of self-sufficiency is erroneous because of the marginalized position that the rural populations are in. They can therefore "not be expected to fully determine their own destinies or improve their lot by relying solely on their own innate and learned capacities." But implicitly he seems to assume that they should have an interest in doing so. Even if we could find such a "self-sufficient social actor" it is hardly likely that he/she would be able to "fully determine his/her own destiny". Upon closer scrutiny this idea is ludicrous, nobody does that, in Africa or elsewhere.

He does not see perennial dependence as necessarily objectionable though. He suggests that, given the way things are, work should be done to assure that this dependency evolve into interdependency, thus developing durable associations and ways of management and exchange not just within village communities but between communities and other non-village institutions. Dependence, being inevitable, should thus at least give way to linkages of structural parity and interdependence between village and non-village social structures.

The propositions that Maclure makes for establishing this interdependence are, however, not very convincing. They include "the active involvement of local people in analysing their own problems and needs." Secondly, the "formulation of proposals should originate from procedures of partnership established between NGO-staff and community representatives". But it seems that it is exactly this "active involvement" which is so difficult given the very uneven status of the different actors on this NGO arena, and the very different interests they pursue.

Finally, a remark about methodology. There is surprisingly no mention of the problems occurring when interviewing villagers about development activities. This is somehow strange as the "patron-client relationships" that Maclure claims tend to emerge could be expected to be reflected in the way respondents gear their answers to the interviewer, who could be seen as a potential partner who wil provide sustained assistance to the community. No reference is thus made to the problem of respondents answering questions according to what interests they might see in presenting a certain view to the interviewer.

This is reflected in the rather simplistic way animation rurale is perceived as "cultural invasion". When quoting a peasant saying "I cannot advise you. You know more than we do", Maclure takes the statement for granted, and sees it as an example of how the villagers consider themselves ignorant *vis-à-vis* NGO animation agents. This is probably an underestimation of the villagers' ability to use what Olivier de Sardan has termed "les savoirs populaires sociaux", which is the villagers' accumulated knowledge about how to take advantage of, for instance, a credit scheme; how to behave in meetings with "*les animateurs*"; how to deal with interviewers, etc.(Olivier de Sardan, 1995, p. 146.). Maclure does not get far beyond the simplifications of Franz Fanon, who sees outside influences as a sort of cultural imperialism to which the villagers can react with nothing but alienation. When the villager claims that "You know more than I do", it is actually an attempt to create linkages of dependency between the interviewer and the respondent.

The reception of outside influences and the way these are incorporated into local society thus needs a more nuanced analysis. When Crehan & van Oppen (1988) described how farmers told people from the national cotton board in Zambia that "we are your sons and daughters, you are developing us", they highlighted the fact that this was to be seen as an attempt from the peasants to establish perennial relations with providers of certain commodities (agricultural inputs, transport of cash crops), rather than an example of total submission to the state, and an alienation towards local values.

To sum up, Maclure provides a number of very important points of critique to the debate of the role of NGOs in rural development, not only in Burkina Faso but in all very aid-influenced societies. His point regarding the impossibility of avoiding dependency and of reaching self-sufficiency is pertinent and provides a needed contribution to a debate that has suffered from too much rhetoric and reluctance to deal with antagonisms. The problem is that he ends up contradicting himself by suggesting a perfection of the very tools, which he condemns as inadequate.

3.3.2 Atampugre

Atampugre (1997) constitutes a second case in recent studies more critical of the work of NGOs in Burkina Faso and their role in rural development. Atampugre delivers a harsh criticism to two English-based NGOs working in Northern Burkina Faso, Oxfam UK/Eire and ACORD.

He claims that NGOs are no longer just a Northern phenomenon but that it is now in the interest of the African middle classes to create NGOs as these "pay off", i.e. constitute important career prospects. Following the debate triggered off by the failure of international NGOs to address problems in conflict areas with need for emergency help like Somalia and Rwanda, he attempts to draw attention to Burkina Faso, a very peaceful country, where NGOs have nevertheless equally faced enormous challenges.

Atampugre puts forward the following essential points in his article:

- He insists that the development of local NGOs and local community-based organizations be understood in a historical framework taking into account especially the colonial heritage, where village organisation was a prerequisite if a village wanted to deal with external markets; and the legacy of the Sankara years, which showed the importance of social organization at all levels of society in social transformation.

- As with Maclure, his major concern is that village organizations often become entirely dependent upon external aid from foreign donors, both in terms of means and organizational capacity, and they therefore do not become sustainable.

- He stresses the importance of the decentralization process and the link between this and the success of village organisations. However, he seriously questions whether the dominant social class will relinquish the power necessary in order to make this decentralization effective. Their reluctance to do so has led many donors to shortcut and reach decentralized levels through NGOs ,and it is within this framework that their upsurge should be understood.

- He claims that foreign NGOs have had severe difficulties in establishing a feeling of ownership of their projects among the local population. The transfer of their activities to local organizations has not changed this situation, and local NGOs suffer the same problems.

Atampugre provides a good historical account of the Burkina Faso cooperative experience, stressing that rural organization on village level has always been a condition for receiving outside assistance, be it in the form of governmental credits, commercialisation of cash crops or NGO support in whatever form. The existence of local "groupements villageois" has always been conditional, in order for external agents to have some kind of institutional linkage. This is still a common feature of village groups, which are often created with the sole purpose of attracting aid.

Atampugre however claims that this village organization has, despite the conditionality, in certain cases, and especially during the Sankara years, succeeded in advancing village interests. He furthermore claims that the legacy of the Sankara years has played an important part in current efforts by village groupements to improve their situation, and has showed that collective action could help overcome problems that normal coping strategies were incapable of dealing with. Furthermore, decentralization and adjustment efforts in the 80's and 90's have encouraged donors'

interest in surpassing the government level by channelling them directly to decentralized levels and local NGOs.

The fact that the local organizations have been externally driven, however, created a dynamism where there is a risk that the local institution immediately becomes void of any content the moment the outside support disappears or an opportunistic objective has been met. It is, thus, difficult to estimate how many village *groupements* currently exist in Burkina Faso, as they exist in virtually every village (and there are often several in each), linked either to the government extension service or to an NGO.

In the two cases that Atampugre cites, foreign NGOs have had great difficulties in transferring responsibilities to local associations, as these have been dependent on continued funding and unable to generate surplus themselves to sustain their efforts. It seems as well (though Atampugre does not dwell too much upon this) that the local NGOs operate with objectives that are extremely vague and impossible to assess more precisely. Objectives like "improving living conditions and assuring sustainable development" are appealing goals but do not include any kind of strategy. In fact, they risk blurring the outlining of the NGOs' activities rather than clarifying them. And there might even be social actors that see this as an advantage.

Finally he argues that there is a need to "match resource flows to the absorptive and managerial capacities" of a local association to assure sustainability.

Atampugre concludes that only activities that respond to the pressing and lasting priorities of the rural populations are sustainable. The way certain activities have been managed shows a strong ability to deal with specific problems when the necessary capacity and commitment is there. There is, however, a huge institutional problem in the sense that when the foreign NGO withdraws and a local NGO continues, it is unable (and uninterested) obtain autonomy and becomes very dependent upon foreign support for its continuation.

3.3.2.1 Critique

Atampugre, like Maclure, has methodological problems. In analysing village dynamics, he quotes an analysis of the objectives behind the formation village groups. Distinctions are made according to whether groups were formed at the initiative of the villagers or of the extension agents, whether it was to attract aid, to "develop initiatives" or to imitate. This very interesting exercise shows that village groups are mainly created by villagers themselves in order to deal with local problems. There is, unfortunately, no account of how these questions were posed. It seems that once again it is not taken into account that respondents react strategically when answering these questions, analysing which answer will serve the respondent best in the case that the interviewer becomes a potential partner (which he apparently did, as it was the donor institution that conducted the study). The same problem recurswhen he evaluates NGO activities. The famous *diquettes* are deemed entirely successful by the farmers, but their construction is not replicated, Atampugre says. This is because of the inability of poor farmers to assure transport. Probably so, but it might as well be that farmers say that they are successful in order to assure relations with the donor agency that provided them (See next chapter for an elaborate discussion of this).

Like Maclure, Atampugre sees a problem in relations of dependency. Local NGOs or unions are as dependent as ever on external funding; the transfer of responsibilities from foreign to local

organizations has done nothing to change this. The problem for Atampugre is that in the transfer of responsibility and resources to local NGOs as mentioned above, one has to understand that it is important to match resource flows with the absorptive and management capacity of local institutions.

But again, who says that dependency is bad? It is a normative concept like "self-reliance", and it is hard to see the incentive for a rural peasant organisation in proving as quickly as possible that it is independent i.e. that it can continue without support.

Another complicated question relates to Atampugre's idea of "matching resource flows with absorptive and management capacities". Again, it is very difficult on a concrete level to do this, and an organisation will rarely have the incentive to do it itself. An organisation like the UNDP has an enormous absorptive and management capacity, but you only very rarely see any concrete results of their work. "Absorptive and management capacity" remains a very abstract and normative concept.

Like with Maclure, Atampugre raises some very central points for a more thorough critique of NGO activities in Burkina Faso. We are far beyond the uncritical praise of NGO activities as genuine grass-roots mobilization in a society where antagonisms are virtually absent and everybody was in favour of "development". However, he does not get much beyond regretting that relations of dependence prevail even when local institutions have replaced donor agencies. This is a shame as Atampugre seems to have an intimate knowledge of the organizations that he is analysing. A more thorough account of how the NGOs develop into arenas for gaining access to resources for development or, as Maclure puts it, become "transfer points of power and knowledge", would have been very interesting.

3.3.3 Other NGO studies

A number of other studies on development NGOs could be mentioned. (Stringfellow *et al.* (1997) is an attempt to produce certain recommendations regarding what to do (as a donor) and especially what to avoid when working to support farmers' groups like the Burkinan *groupements*. It focuses upon an analysis of the successes and shortcomings of different intervention forms of donors and NGOs. The shortcomings listed are

- That donors tend to rush the group formation process;

- That they tend to have inflated expectations as to what these groups can undertake;

- Donors are often too focused upon credits and subsidies in the initial phases of group development.

These factors lead to the creation of groups that are not *member-driven* and not *homogenous*. What should be avoided is attracting people merely seeking handouts, as in these cases the groups will collapse the moment the handouts stop, and this will not lead to *genuine* farmer cooperation.

What should be done is, rather, to support groups in improving market access i.e. access to banks, suppliers, traders, exporters etc; to carefully consider the different improvement options; and to listen carefully to the farmers' preferences. This increases the likelihood of membership control.

Outside support should be provided at the community's request and might include training, knowledge and contacts, thus facilitating linkages with markets. This goes for what is termed *"linkage-dependent"* groups (groups working with a supplier/buyer on which they are, to some extent, dependent), sometimes for their mutual benefit, as well as for *"autonomous"* groups.

3.3.3.1 Critique

Clear in its recommendations, Stringfellow *et al.* is nevertheless frustrating reading. The main problem is that in a country like Burkina Faso the linkages that farmers would like are not linkages to the market but linkages to funding institutions like NGOs and bilateral donors. It is therefore hard to imagine a situation where the donor delivers facilitating inputs in the form of training etc. when expectations from farmer communities are more that the donor should supply logistics (water, dispensaries, schools, farming equipment.) The article seriously underestimates the influence of the donor by virtue of his/her/its mere presence, and does not pay attention to the sorts of clientelism and brokerage that exist in connection with the donor's presence.

Another problem stems from the way the paper on the one hand insists that support be provided at the community's request, but at the same time quite thoroughly defines what type of support should be provided. This support is furthermore clearly focused on "soft" inputs, training, contacts etc. and not on what research suggests is mostly in the interest of Burkinan farmers (see Maclure 1995 and below), namely logistics, buildings, credits and jobs.

The authors have a set of implicit beliefs about rural development that are not clearly defined, but normatively assumed as common consensus when dealing with rural development. The development activity supported by the donor is supposed to be *sustainable*. This means that after a phase of intervention, the farmers are supposed to continue the activities that were initiated with the help of the donor at a higher level than before intervention, and without further support. For an activity to be sustainable the cooperation has to be *genuine*, which as far as I can see means small-scale , member-driven, with face-to-face contact and homogeneity among members. Why this should reflect genuity is not revealed. The paper does not discuss that one should expect that farmers' groups will normally fight actively to assure the continuity of assistance from the outside, thus trying by all means to avoid sustainability.

At one point, the paper also claims that there is a trade-off between economy of scale and group cohesion. There is, however, no analysis or even taking into account of village hierarchies and local power structures, which are often very central elements in the construction of local institutions, structures that are not necessarily homogenous at all, and which have little to do with scale.

By way of conclusion, one could say that the paper is a sympathetic attempt to avoid the most common errors in institutional support project design, but it nonetheless overlooks certain more fundamental problems in institution-building attempts and development aid. First of all, it ignores local power structures and secondly, it projects its own normative assumptions concerning the

development of African society. It implicitly assumes that egalitarianism, homogeneity and market forces will lead to genuine cooperation for sustainable development.

3.3.3.2. Holmén & Jirström.

A fourth paper (Holmen & Jirstrom, 1997) dealing with NGO-work within development is more critical and more theoretical in its approach, and much less policy oriented. It gives a quick review of a number of writings on NGO work, and provides a precise critique of some of the more populist development discourses related to NGO work.

The paper reflects upon the many expectations different people have had of NGOs, and questions whether these have been realistic. Especially the tacitly-accepted "non-profit" and altruistic character of the NGOs is questioned, and it is suggested that "it would perhaps be better to recognize individual economic self-interest as a decisive cross-cultural driving force in social reproduction processes." This is a long and complicated discussion, that I shall not deal with at this point. But initially one may ask what is actually meant by economic self-interest in a society where interpersonal relations, adherence to groups, families and clans are central elements in resource allocation mechanisms. Anyway, to look at self-interest as decisive when analysing the actions of social actors seems a better entry point for a critical analysis of NGOs, as these are so often attributed characteristics like "grass-roots", non-profit", "empowering" etc. without any other reason than the fact that they themselves claim to be so.

The authors provide the following points of critique of NGOs:

- their activities are often uncoordinated and hampered by authoritarian structures;

- Although they often claim to do so, they are unsuccessful in reaching the poor populations;

- when acting on the basis of social considerations, NGOs tend to ignore that there is no economic viability in the activity unless outside support is maintained;

- NGO activities, subsidized from abroad as they are, render it impossible for unsupported businesses to enter the market, and they therefore *delay develop-ment*;

- The very common objective of NGOs to *empower* people is highly debateable. The authors suggest that empowerment be dismissed as a myth, as the concept implies that people who have not been empowered do not assess their socio-economic situation, and that they need training in order to do so. The opposite is often true. People know very well the socio-economic realities that they are facing and they also know why action is impossible without running into conflict with oppressive forces;

- Empowerment efforts by NGOs often generate new claim-making groups which support patronage networks existing in developing countries, thus

reinforcing clientelism, and "perpetuating aid-dependency rather than giving rise to genuine development from below";

- Holding up NGOs as panaceas to development from below is completely unrealistic as it is premature to believe that a certain type of organization will be able to cure the resource access problems of poverty and underdevelopment;

- NGOs tend to work parallel to the state and the result is often an undermining of the state, as resources go from the latter to the former, as these are more in vogue within the donor community;

The article finally suggests that a less sacrosanct view of "small-scale" be adapted, that more large-scale work and more partnerships between governmental and non-governmental institutions be initiated, as the one part cannot work without a strong presence of the other.

Finally it is noted that international trade works to the detriment of developing countries through trade barriers that are worth double the annual development aid flow. Furthermore the debt trap works as a more fundamental impediment to development, rendering the patchy and dispersed small-scale NGO activities ridiculous.

This article is more interesting than Stringfellow *et al.* in the sense that it attempts a critical deconstruction of some of the ultimately meaningless development discourse.

However, this article, like the former ends up not going far enough with this deconstruction, thus ending up suggesting what should be done if "real development" is desired.

For instance, they state that they fear that by establishing new claim-making groups (through "empowerment"-initiatives), NGO work is "likely to perpetuate aid-dependency rather than giving rise to genuine development from below". All of a sudden, the authors become extremely normative: what is so wrong with aid dependency? And whose goal is it to have a situation without aid? What is "genuine development from below"? Suddenly, the authors become entangled in the very development discourse they criticise so vehemently. Genuine development from below which is not based on establishing claim-making groups, and not based on foreign aid to me seems very hard to obtain, especially as (as they rightly point out) "it would be premature to believe that the cure to under-development would be found in a certain type of organization".

It furthermore contains some confusing discussions about when a state is too strong, too weak, as if a state's strength or weakness was something to be measured. This is derived from a simplistic notion of the state as something which can be weakened or strengthened by, for instance, NGOs outside the state a dualistic interpretation of state-civil society relations, where something is inside, or outside the state. The idea that NGOs might be "undermining the third world state" (p.14) seems to be an underestimation of the capacity of dominating groups to build a power basis outside a narrow state institutional framework. Furthermore, it is a reification of the state as merely a set of bureaucratic spheres, which excludes a more elaborate discussion of power.

3.3.4 Piveteau

The most interesting, and least ideologically biased NGO-study from Burkina Faso is by Piveteau (1996). He was member of the Gabas *et al.* team, but his report is quite clear and more cautious in the goals it sets. He asks the simple question of whether NGOs promote agricultural development in Burkina Faso. The question is extremely interesting, as overall measurements of the social impact of NGO work in Burkina Faso have had a tendency of being unanimously assumed as significant rather than empirically verified.

Piveteau stresses the commitment of the government in associating the NGOs with development work, which was shown by their facilitating efforts in creating the national bureau for NGOs BSONG, under the auspices of the president (later moved to the Planning Ministry.) This is coupled with a demonstration of how the NGOs have made a significant change from disaster relief to "development activities", especially within social fields and on a relatively small scale.

Like Maclure and Atampugre he seriously questions whether it is reasonable to speak of a genuine partnership between NGOs and beneficiary groups, as it is in the majority of cases the NGO that designs, implements and executes development activities at village level, putting the villagers in an "attentive" role.

Piveteau concludes that NGOs have failed to promote participatory development, and have, consciously or not, imposed their own models on Burkinan villages, creating new forms of dependency.

Piveteau is not, like the two other cases, focusing on a few specific NGOs, but tries to draw a more general picture of NGO activities in Burkina Faso, especially, as mentioned, the NGOs working with "development" as opposed to disaster relief. It is especially within what is termed the "social sector", that NGOs are active, i.e. training, health and *"promotion féminine"*. Within agriculture it is especially within horticulture and anti-erosion measures that NGOs are active. These activities are object of Piveteau's scrutiny.

Piveteau has some interesting accounts of the relations between donors and beneficiaries, concerning who takes the initiative for the development activities and who defines what the activities should be. The initiative to contact is taken more or less by the 50-50 village/NGO, the conception of the activities predominantly done by NGOs, their execution predominantly by the villagers and the financing almost entirely taken care of by the NGO. He then points to a very interesting methodological aspect when researching these questions. Having interviewed the beneficiaries *ex post*, villagers were asked what activities they would have prioritized. Here one notes that there is a great synergy between what they termed as their difficulties *ex ante* and the demand which was, however, only expressed in 1 out of eleven cases. Participation is thus not stemming from a strategy aiming at meeting an expressed demand, but rather from a wait-and-see attitude aiming at formalizing some kind of relation with an external operator, susceptible of, sooner or later, answering needs that are still "latent". Hence, in the first place any proposition from the NGO will be accepted and welcomed.

This according to Piveteau reflects that relations between donors, NGOs and beneficiaries remain very hierarchical and limit the possibility of establishing "genuine partnerships". Villagers do not

possess the necessary means (financial, discursive, educational), but this does not necessarily mean that they are unable to produce answers to change, or that they are passive and un-innovative. Their apparent passivity, should according to Piveteau, rather be understood as a reluctance towards taking risks with adventurous experiments with technologies that have not proven their worth. The NGO thus "affirms itself as an expert in the evaluation of popular needs, whereafter it falls into an aid model which fails to provide support to internal dynamics" (my translation).

Piveteau goes a bit further concluding that the NGO activities he scrutinizes, especially village gardening projects and the construction of *"diguettes"*, are maybe beneficial for certain recipients, but that their overall impact is negligible, and too small to have any effect on capital investments. Every year, the farmer is going to start over again at the same level as the preceding year, and the NGO-initiated activities are not going to change the overall marginalized situation he/she is in. Investments in *diquettes* show extremely varying results, and should be evaluated more systematically and over a longer timespan before definitive conclusions can be drawn. In this case it is interesting to couple Piveteau with Atampugre, whose investigation showed that 97 % of the farmers said that the *diquettes* were beneficial. Given what was mentioned above about the farmers' "wait-and-see"-attitude, these figures should possibly be further analysed before conclusions regarding their effectiveness are drawn, as the farmers according to Piveteau have no interest in putting forward a negative evaluation of a new intervention in their village.

It is interesting and understandable that in certain cases, according to Piveteau, funds raised through NGO-initiated activities are invested, not in natural resource conservation measures, but in financing the *"chef de village's"* journeys in order to assure that he nourish the village's relations with the donors (See also Laurent 1996).

Investments in repairs and the expansion of projects initiated by donors are extremely rare at village level, and the benefits obtained through the implementation of new agricultural techniques are negligible and do not permit the continuity of the activity. The NGO thus constantly has to ensure its own survival in an area where it has started to work.

3.4 Critique on NGO studies

Piveteau is more precise in the objectives he sets in his study of NGOs than Maclure and Atampugre, and avoids being normative in his expectations of NGOs working in Burkina Faso like the other four. Furthermore, his methodological considerations are much more sophisticated and reveal more reflection upon the positioning of villagers *vis-a-vis* development institutions.

All NGO-reports point to a number of very central issues, and their conclusions, that NGO activities lead not to increased self-sufficiency, but to some kind of clientelism seem valid. Furthermore it is fortunate that they point to the fact that this clientelism may be unavoidable, and that suggestions on how to overcome problems related to this are put forward. They are all, however, a bit sparse in their theoretical analysis of how things turn out this way.

Maclure and Atampugre's suggestions are somewhat contradictory as well, as they do not suggest a rupture of the system that they criticize so heavily; neither do they attack the structural contradictions of aid assistance, but they come up with some very general notions on the need

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to assure the participation of locals, not only in project execution, but also in the planning. But this is exactly the problem. With such inequalities, it is always the donor that calls the shots, and the way the interface between donor and recipient is constructed is more complicated than just assuring the genuine participation of all parties. Piveteau is more cautious and does not make recommendations apart from excusing the narrow basis on which his conclusions are made, and calling for more thorough research.

My main criticism is that there is a tendency among especially the first four authors to avoid a more thorough analysis of the relations between the donors, the local NGO and the villagers, and they end up with somewhat normative assumptions about "dependency", as if this were necessarily a bad thing being incompatible with genuine development as it will not be sustainable.

Although they would probably argue that it is beyond the scope of their studies, a discussion of the relations between governmental and non-governmental institutions would equally have been interesting, but is virtually absent in all three studies. Piveteau recalls the positive attitude of the government and its initiative to coordinate NGO work in an overall national NGO bureau, but this is primarily seen as a sign of goodwill, not as a mechanism of control, which would be another equally valid way to look at it. Atampugre dwells upon the Sankara years, and stresses the importance that this period has had. But this, again, is contested elsewhere (see Otayek 1988), and is not empirically founded in his accounts.

It seems obvious though that the relations between government development institutions and NGOs must undergo interesting transformations in a period when the state is being dismantled and its services transferred to the private sector or "civil society". A series of hypotheses could be put forward:

• With the dismantling of the state and the introduction of alternative channels through which development assistance can be handled, services will improve because of the competition;

• Because of the huge transfers of resources to NGOs, government institutions, in order to get their share, enter into a conflictual relation with NGOs:

• A large number of the government employees quit the ministries and join the NGOs, where payments are higher and prospects seem brighter;

• Nothing much happens. The NGOs work alongside the state agencies, but make no significant difference. At village level no distinction is made between Governmental and non-governmental, any outside assistance is OK.

It is on the basis of the fieldwork presented in the next chapter, that I shall try to pursue these questions. In the town of Dori, multilateral, bilateral and NGO- development   assistance is inserted into a complex, highly politicized setting.

3.5 Conclusion

The review of the different types of aid to Burkina Faso, from the OECD-report to the assessments of small NGO initiatives shows a number of similarities in the different forms of aid. It seems that a problem is that many of the "shortcomings" stem from the fact that the aid does not fulfil certain objectives, which are on closer scrutiny based on very normative and ideological notions of development which are not subscribed to in the "beneficiary" society. Notions like sustainability, independence, self-reliance and participation which are the objectives of development projects seem to be contested and the object of struggles. Furthermore, the outcome of the different development interventions cannot be reduced to a succes/failure matrix, as the social positionings within the projects constitute rather complex social processes.

What is striking is also that there does not seem to be any significant qualitative difference between the types of aid, i.e. whether it is NGO aid, bilateral or multilateral, it runs into the same type of problems: lack of "sustainability", problems of "ownership", tense "partnership" relations etc. In the following chapter we shall see how this is played out in a local context.

Finally, all research, except maybe Piveteau's, is caught up in a "tool-perfecting" discourse, where a number of preconceived notions about what development is supposed to be about are taken for granted, and where political issues are not taken sufficiently seriously, but downplayed for the sake of development.

Chapter 4. Development projects and local politics. The Picture of a Dorian Greyzone.

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I shall argue that development intervention is better analysed as a contested and negotiated process over externally provided economic, political and symbolic resources rather than as a planned intervention, carried out with varying degrees of success. This is, of course, hardly very provoking, but nevertheless demands a different view of development projects and institutions not as agents of induced social change but as arenas of conflict and positionings over different resources.

I am drawing from field experience in two regions of Burkina Faso, where Danish development aid within natural resource management to Burkina Faso has been concentrated: Boulgou in the South-East and Seno in the North of the country. Both these regions are influenced by projects based on the *"Gestion de terroir"* approach, developed by the UNDP and the World Bank. I shall attempt to describe these projects, not as simple institutions of development, but as parts of a local political struggle.

The idea behind the *"Gestion de terroir"* approach is to strengthen local peoples' capacities to manage their natural resources in a more sustainable way, thereby avoiding the depletion of their production basis. The approach suggests that the enhanced pressure on natural resources requires more formal institutional arrangements at village and inter-village level in order to halt degradation through the establishment of *"Comités de Gestion de Terroirs"* (CGT) at village level and the creation of *"Unités agro-pastorales"* (UAP), grouping together representatives from different CGTs at zonal, inter-village level. It is, in other words, a policy which is clearly influenced by the World Bank approach, emphasizing the need for institution building and optimizing the scarce institutional capacity, and stressing planning as a means of utilizing resources in a rational and sustainable way. One might conclude that this approach is a sympathetic recognition of the fact that villagers know more about their resources than government officials, and that when they embark upon practices that deplete their resources, it is not out of ignorance but necessity. At the same time, it is recognized within the approach that different user groups, within and outside the village may have different interests and will make legitimate claims concerning the use of resources, involving negotiation and potential conflict. On the other hand, it is remarkable that the Bank believes that mere management can solve problems of this kind and magnitude. And finally, as we shall see below, it is a serious misinterpretation of the institutional set-up within the villages to believe that such committees operate in a void.

The *"Gestion de Terroir"* approach is to be seen in a context of a national policy of decentralization, a slow and complicated process embarked upon since the new constitution was adopted in 1991. It is so far not clear what the outcome of these initiatives will be. It can be concluded that

so far the initiatives have been very dependnt not only on donor funding, but also on donor initiative.

A UNDP Evaluation of the PNGT-programme from 1995 (PNUD 1995) is optimistic in the sense that the PNGT-programme according to them has given the population the knowledge enabling them to regenerate soils, assure food security, improve conditions of life, improve their "*cadre de vie*" (the same thing?) and take charge of local development. However, in order for this to materialize it was seen as necessary to enhance literacy programmes through more project involvement; that projects put more economic means at the disposition of villagers; that projects aim at implementing programmes that would be able to keep the younger people in the villages so that they didn't go to Cote d'Ivoire.

The evaluation is interesting in the sense that it states that knowledge has been transmitted, but makes no mention whatsoever of concrete activities that have led to any changes in natural resource management techniques. The alleged positive impact of the introduction of *Gestion de Terroirs* is derived entirely from questioning villagers as to how the programme has worked, not from empirical verifications of changed practices.
Once again, it is an example of stating the problem as lack of institutional setup and farmers' knowledge about their own situation. And once again, the apparent cure to the apparent absence of visible changes is more of the same.

The evaluation stresses a point that is also reflected elsewhere (Engberg-Pedersen 1995), that the *Gestion de Terroir* programme is very dependent upon financing from external agencies in order to become translated into concrete action. The Programme Sahel Burkina (PSB), which groups together three natural resource management projects in the Seno Province one of which is the Danish DANIDA/PSB-project, is one of the most important of such initiatives in the country. A common criticism is that the *Gestion de Terroir* has become a process initiated "from above" (Engberg-Pedersen 1995), as opposed to being an initiative "from below". Other researchers point to the fact that there are necessarily losers and winners within the implementation of this approach, but that it is, nevertheless, a move away from a more purely technicist approach to natural resource management to an approach that acknowledges the political dimensions of natural resource management, which calls for a cautious optimism (Batterbury 1998, Degnbol 1996a). This optimism is, however, derived from other areas than Seno and Boulgou.

4.2 The Seno Province

The Seno province in the North of the country is characterized by an emphasis on livestock as the main rural production form, rainfed agriculture being subject to great variability due to insecure rainfall patterns. Conventional wisdom has it that lands in the region are degrading because of increased pressure on grazing lands. Statistics are not good, but it is widely accepted that the number of domestic animals in the region is higher than ever, due to a number of good rainfall years since the great droughts of 1984-85, profitability in livestock raising has increased due to the devaluation of the CFA in 1994, and market access has improved. Livestock thus remains the central investment object among both rich, poor, rural and urban segments of society. Agriculture consists of rainfed millet cultivation with low yields and a low degree of input of fertilizer etc. Conventional wisdom indicates that agriculture is spreading into lands formerly used as grazing areas (For a discussion see Nielsen, Reenberg & Rasmussen 1997). At village level, conflict

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between villagers and between farmers and transhumant herders because of the intrusion of animals in cultivated fields, is the most common source of discord. An interesting new tendency in the form of a *de facto* privatization of the grazing lands is occurring due to the spread of donkey carts in the region. People have thus started constructing "hangars" in order to store harvested bush grass in them for stall feeding of their animals.

Dori is the provincial capital of the Seno province in the Sahelian part of Burkina Faso, but it is the administrative centre of not only Seno but the entire Sahelian region of the country. Furthermore, it is the centre of the ancient but still very present Liptako Kingdom. It is a town with roughly 30.000 inhabitants, of which the majority are *fulani* speaking.

The region is the driest in the country, and it has been considered drought- and crisis-ridden for a number of years. This has resulted in the establishment of an above average representation of development initiatives aiming at addressing problems related to degradation of natural resources. The bulk of these projects have their headquarters in Dori. *There are approximately 400 jobs within and around development institutions in Dori dealing with natural resource management, and these are among the best paid in town* (based on my own calculations).

4.3 The PSB/DANIDA Project

The PSB/DANIDA-project was launched in 1990, aiming at establishing local institutions capable of assuring a more sustainable use of natural resources. At the time the project was executed by UNSO (United Nations Sudan-Sahelian Office), but financed by DANIDA in a multi-bilateral arrangement. With the changed mandate of UNSO, now being the UNDP-agency for the implementation of the International Convention for the Combat of Desertification, DANIDA has taken over the execution of the project. It is part of a larger programme, the *Programme Sahel du Burkina Faso* (PSB), which is made up of three natural resource management projects in the Sahelian region, the two others financed by GTZ (German) and Dutch cooperation. These are based in Dori and Gorom Gorom, 52 km north of Dori. The three projects have split the region between them, and all work with the same *'Gestion de Terroir'* approach. A very important difference between the DANIDA-project and the two others is that the latter have a white Chief Technical Advisor and a few other white employees, whereas the DANIDA project is run entirely by local staff. In their setup and approach, the three projects are quite similar.

The DANIDA project aims at supporting the creation of different producer and user groups at village and intervillage level in order to assure a more sustainable use of natural resources. These established institutions are meant to be able to make decisions regarding the use of common and private lands. The support provided by the project to the village populations consists of :

-Training programmes,
-soil and water conservation measures (SWC),
-credit programmes,
-water facilities.

The training programmes include literacy training, and *"animation"* in the form of information about the need to combat environmental degradation and support for the creation of CGTs. The SWC measures consist mainly of support for the construction of *'diguettes'*, i.e. stone bunds that

are meant to halt water run-off in the fields and thus increase the productivity of soils and decrease water erosion. The support needed for the construction of these is first and foremost the transport of the stones, and secondly some advice as to how to construct them. Credit programmes are very small-scale, are addressed mainly at women and consist of credits for animal fattening and other small-scale income generating activities. Finally, water facilities consist of the construction of wells, boreholes and the so-called *boulis,* large dug-out tanks collecting surface water mainly for watering cattle in the dry season.

The project has made a "zonage" of its intervention area, and an *"animateur"* is attached to each zone, covering 10 to 15 villages. The *animateur* is responsible for the creation of CGT's and UAP's, and is furthermore expected to monitor their activities, run training activities and assist in credit disbursements. The success of the project at village level is thus closely linked to the performance of the animateur. And the animateur is under pressure from several sides, a point I shall elaborate on later.

4.4 Institutions facing the PSB/DANIDA Project

Although one might get the opposite impression from the above, the PSB/DANIDA project is in no way operating in an institutional void. First of all the project is working within a local political context, which is an amalgamation of powers based on the domination systems of the Liptako Kingdom and branches of the Burkina Faso government. These two types of government are often referred to, simplistically, as traditional and modern powers.

4.4.1 Local power

The ethnic composition of the population is rather complicated, dominated by *fulanis* and their former slaves, the *rimaybe*. Other ethnic groups include *tamachek, songhaï, bella, mossi,* all comprising modes of identification that are far from stable. Power has, however, historically been in the hands of the *fulani* nobles, the *ferroBe,* the descendants of old jihad warriors, originally coming from what is now Mali. The *ferroBe* ousted the dominant *gourmantche* people from the area in a successful war in 1709. The superior of the kingdom, the Amirou, i.e. the Emir is picked from these Dicko's, the family name of the *ferroBe.* The title is normally inherited, but competition for the title has been subject of bitter rivalries, which are very alive and reflected in the clanic setup of the Dori community today (Irwin 1981, Lund, 1999a). The title of Emir was formally abandoned as an institutionally-recognized category within the Burkina Faso state in 1963, but he has continually held considerable influence. With the new constitution of 1991, the present emir has recently been elected mayor of Dori.

The "Dicko's" are made up of different clans constantly fighting each other or opportunistically uniting against each other in unholy alliances. An important arena for these struggles is the CDP, the ruling party. The mayor leads one of the three most important clans. The two others are led by the former MP, Sanda Dicko and the present MP Ismaël Diallo, and the rich businessman Birabia Dicko.

The project is constantly solicited by local powers as a potential partner in activities proposed by these clan leaders. The mayor constantly proposes activities that the project should participate in

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financing, especially cultural events or campaigns to clean up the town. A few youth associations and a women's association have been created, two of them by the mayor, in order to address development institutions in this sense. The project is, however, very careful not to "take part in politics", i.e. not to take sides in the on-going struggles between the different *ferroBe* clans, as they are played out in the ruling CDP party. The project is engaged in development, a sphere which is considered outside politics. "Politics", on the other hand, is regarded quite narrowly as struggles over state resources fought out within the political parties.

This is probably part of the explanation as to why the local powers are remarkably uninterested in the development activities of the project. The project is, first and foremost, seen as a means to get access to resources in the form of vehicles, fuel and as a potential employer of the *ferroBe* subordinates, the latter point apparently the most delicate aspect of relations between the project and the local powers. The German PSB-project has taken a more harsh stand than the DANIDA-project in this question, and according to the mayor the Germans "do nothing for the town of Dori, but only hire people from Burkina Faso". The Germans have recruited their staff on the basis of tests and C.V.'s, and therefore their staff is, to a large extent, from other regions than the Sahel. The National Director of the DANIDA project is in a delicate position as he is under heavy pressure from local powers seeking cooperation with the affluent project. The national directors of the two other PSB-projects can more easily refer to their white counterparts when suggestions for alternative management procedures are proposed by local partners. The German CTA is oblivious to the mayor's critique: "I will have nothing to do with the mayor, what he does has nothing to do with development". This is an interesting clash between two sets of rationalities of compliance. The mayor sees it as a natural thing that the project should support his Liptako-based systems of subordination if it wants to help Dori, whereas the CTA adheres to Western principles of performance and nationhood.

In a sense, the clan leaders were also remarkably ignorant as to the more specific objectives of the projects. Dicko Sanda in fact confused the bilateral projects within the PSB programme with the NGOs operating in Dori, lamenting that "being basically a politician, he was not that much into development". The projects were mainly interesting to him inasmuch as they could be helpful in his political work as providers of jobs and logistics for his subordinates. He did not distinguish between "good" or "bad" projects, but only mentioned that certain people in certain NGOs were easier to reach agreements with than others. These people were local elites running certain NGOs.

The *ferroBe* clan leaders are, however, *incontournable* when it comes to mobilizing support in political conflicts at village level. Systems of brokerage and protection are well established and play an important role in conflict mitigation in the area (See Lund 1999a, 1999b). It is, therefore, most likely that were the project within the PSB-programme to embark on more decisive moves within natural resource management practices, which weredetrimental to *ferrobe* interests, the projects would face severe obstruction from the latter.

The term "local power" is in a sense as misleading as "traditional power" , as power in Dori is closely tied to networks that are not fixed within a spatial context. It does not make sense to make too rigid distinctions between different levels or topographies of power, relations like central, local, external etc. are fluid; the local NGO has a huge international network; central government representatives in Dori are left at the mercy of the *ferrobe* rulers; clientelist relations with offices

in Ouagadougou play a very important role; external agents may be economically very important, but remain defenceless when trying to determine modes of resource allocation and decision-making processes. One may, however, consider as Gould does (1997) how locality and tradition become modern weapons within struggles for resource mobilization, a social construction with political significance as issues around which support can be mobilized. This difficulty in operating with too narrow an interpretation of locality is equally reflected in the problems of implementing *"Gestion de Terroirs"* and decentralization policies.

4.4.2 Development Institutions In Dori

The CRPA *(Centre Regional de Promotion Agro-pastoral)* is the central Government agricultural extension agency. The CRPA has 12 different centres throughout Burkina Faso. The regional division of the respective services of the different Ministries is somewhat complicated as the forestry/environment agency is divided into 10 units, the Ministry of Planning into 10 (but not the same ten), the army into 4, the Ministry of Health into 8 etc. This of course does not make cooperation between different ministries and services easier. It is often stated as an institutional problem that the services under the different Ministries are not divided along similar lines, and this is said to have a detrimental impact on the degree of co-operation between the different institutions. It is hard to say whether more uniformity in the bureaucratic setup would necessarily lead to more concerted efforts. It might as well serve as an excuse for lack of co-operation at the moment.

The backbone of the CRPA is the number of employed *"encadreurs"*, each responsible for agricultural extension in a number of villages. This extension agent normally covers 10 to 15 villages, of which he (sometimes she) (in principle) visits one a day, thus visiting every village once a fortnight. These *encadreurs* are equipped with a house of reasonable standing in the area, a salary of roughly 50.000 CFA per month (appr. 100 USD), plus a small motorbike. These motorbikes are financed by the PRSAP-programme, the huge World Bank Support programme. Apart from fuel for his motorbike, the extension agent has nothing but his good advice and his authority as a state agent to offer to the peasants. Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that this system functions relatively well in Burkina Faso, compared to other countries in West Africa.

In certain areas, especially in the south of the country, there seems to be a certain satisfaction with the work of the *encadreur*, who has in some places apparently played an important role in the introduction of new agricultural production techniques such as plowing with ox traction, composting and the construction of dikes. Furthermore the *encadreurs* have been active in setting up applications for credits, and have been acting as arbiters in disputes over land, especially in cases where animals have been grazing in the fields of agriculturalists. The peasants acknowledge this role, and critical remarks are usually limited to complaints about the irregularity of his visits, or *encadreurs* who have been "too busy chasing the women of our village" and the like. There do seem to be examples of rather rude treatment of farmers who have had their animals confiscated when loans to the CNCA *(Caisse Nationale de Crédit Agricole)* were not repaid, but the *encadreur* was not accused of this, and the *encadreur* usually makes an effort to make farmers understand that there is an institutional separation between the CNCA and the CRPA. This is partly why the provision of agricultural inputs, formerly the responsibility of the *encadreurs*, is now being privatized. CRPA employees admit that misuse of funds has occurred, and that this has had a highly detrimental influence on farmer/*encadreur*-relationships.

It should, however, be noted that in answering our questions farmers were very cautious in making negative statements about agricultural extension agents, as they have no assurance that the interviewer will take their side in a possible conflict following the revelation of unpleasant facts. In one village the villagers claimed that the former extension agent had embezzled a reimbursed credit. But this information was probably only revealed because the man was now dead and had been replaced by another.

The CRPA leadership claims that CRPA is the only institution that has the capacity to give qualified information to farmers about agricultural improvement techniques. The *encadreurs* have the necessary training, and there is a continuity in the effort of the *encadreurs* that permits the establishment of decent relations with the farmers. Too many examples of small and uncoordinated NGOs diffusing imported, non-adapted ideas in a superfluous manner serve as proof of this statement. However, the PSB-projects claim that their staff are better qualified for these tasks, and that the cooperation with the extension service is more an obligation than a need for the running of the project. Furthermore, the director of the SPA (*Service Provincial Agricole*, the provincial branch of CRPA) in Boulgou claimed that problems of misappropriations were not exclusive to the CRPA, but also occurred within the NGOs: "*Ils sont plus bouffeurs que nous*".

The structural adjustment policy includes the *de facto* abolition of the CRPA (Gbikbi 1995). This is, as one can imagine, a very severe step to take involving the dismissal of thousands of functionnaires. As it is furthermore widely recognized that CRPA is performing relatively well compared to similar institutions in other countries in West Africa, total closure is a very drastic step to take. The institution at the moment continues in a dangerous vacuum: the closure has not been implemented, but disillusionment is spreading, resources are increasingly scarce, and there is a risk that their credibility is now diminishing, facilitating closure in the future. According to certain observers, the CRPA is currently falling apart, and any CRPA activity nowadays must necessarily be closely linked to some kind of externally-funded project, which runs its activity with the CRPA as its executing agency.

The outcome of the restructuring is not yet clear, and is to be analysed within a larger context of decentralisation as it is currently occurring in Burkina Faso.

To give an example of the resources available, reference could be made to the director of the*"Service Provinciale de l'Organisation et Formation Professionnelle des Producteurs Agricoles"* (SPOFPP) in the Boulgou Province. The service works as a branch of the CRPA, formerly under a now defunct ministry for Cooperation, but severe cuts have now made it a semiautonomous entity of the Ministry of Agriculture, and is thus not under the financing of the PRSAP programme.

The director of the SPOFPP gave a long list of the objectives of the service, including organising agriculturalists, informing them on how and why to organize, following up on the support and further training as the first task and training of young agriculturalists as the second. Nonetheless, it was obvious that the means were so limited that it was very hard to see how these activities should be implemented. The service had one motorbike and four mopeds (all four in very bad shape) and a budget of 40000 CFA (1FF=100 CFA) for the motorbike per month (petrol and maintenance), 30000 for an *agent de fixation des jeunes* (sic.), and for the five *Chefs de zone*, of

which only three were operational, a total of 25000 per month, i.e. 3500 CFA per zone centre per month!

His main job was to evaluate applications for village *"groupements"*. He clearly recognized the fact that apart from this attribution of a kind of legal status, many of the *groupements* were devoid of any content, but ascribed this to the complete lack of resources. It is thus evident when looking at the performance of the different services under the Ministry of Agriculture, that they are extremely "donor-driven", i.e. that activities are restricted to the areas where donor means are available. It thus becomes difficult to assess to what degree a shift in the funding from one branch of CRPA to another will result in improved performance as it is only the branch that gets the funding that performs.

In the endeavours of the World bank to reform the CRPA two activities (approvisions and commercialisation)have been privatized. CRPA will thus be left with control, training and *"encadrement"*.

According to people both within the World Bank and the CRPA, these attempts have had some rather unfortunate consequences. Especially within the livestock sector they have proved inappropriate as the "private" sector has not been prepared for this transfer. This has allegedly led to increased mortality amongst livestock as vaccines have now been marketed among private tradesmen who have not had the technical skills and interest in assuring vaccination campaigns of sufficient quality. The World Bank Project, PRSAP, is engaged in initiatives to encourage the private sector in this respect, but has apparently not been entirely successful. It could be argued that in fact it is within approvisions and commercialization that the CRPA should have a comparative advantage, as their extension and training efforts (the activities they are now left with) have always been very "top-down" and technicist, and therefore perhaps better taken care of by other agencies. A problem is that the way the *encadrement* is currently run is very expensive, despite attempts to cut spendings; it is run entirely by the World Bank PRSAP project, and the *encadreur* is often left without much to offer the farmers. The *encadreur* of the village of Boudoungel said he "had nothing to offer the farmers", as they consider themselves more knowledgeable about their land than him, and when he does not provide access to agricultural inputs his presence in the village is redundant.

It seems that the opening up of possibilities for the transfer of means from the CRPA to other development institutions has caused a certain jealousy and bitterness among the CRPA agents. The closing down of the CRPA will in any case result in a temporary void, as private and non-governmental institutions are in no way able to take over its central role within rural development in Burkina Faso.

In Dori, the DANIDA-project is collaborating with the different *services* of the different ministries, the CRPA, the *Service de l'Environnement*, or as it is still known *Eaux et Forêts*, and the *Service de l'Hydraulique*. These offices all have extremely limited budgets to run their programmes and are therefore highly dependent upon collaboration with projects capable of delivering per diems, fuel for the vehicles, etc. Collaboration between the project and the services was earlier based on formal cooperation agreements, but because of difficulties in measuring in more concrete terms to what degree the collaboration had lived up to project expectations, the collaboration is now based on *"fiches d'opération"*, punctual agreements on concrete activities

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to be undertaken by the *services*. It is no secret that the collaboration between the project and the *services* is at times seen as an obstacle to the efficiency of the execution of the project, as the *services* do not perform very effectively and often do not have the capacity necessary to undertake the jobs. Staff often do not have the technical skills necessary to dig water points, undertake training, graft trees or whatever; and skilled people have often left the government services for better jobs among donors.

4.4.3 The NGOs

Finally, a number of NGOs operate in Dori. They each have their own agenda and no coordination exists between the work they do. There is very little collaboration between the bilateral projects and the NGOs. The PSB/DANIDA project tried hiring the NGO BERAP to impart training courses to its staff. This turned out to be very costly, however, and the message given was equally dubious, as this NGO has an ideology exclusively of its own based on the ideas of its charismatic leader. Sometimes villages succeed in obtaining financing from an NGO alongside working with the bilateral project, a fact which raises some frustration at project level as the intervention approaches are often different, and the level of "local contribution" to the development activity may differ significantly, which translates into misunderstandings regarding the participatory character of the project. All NGOs are funded from external sources with a very low level of "self-financing". They are run by influential local people with good contacts to *ferroBe* clans, and are monitored carefully by their funding agencies. Their overall importance seems exaggerated, considering the attention and expectations which have been devoted to them, and some of them are very badly managed.

One NGO deserves special mention as it has been active in the organizing of farmers and herders in the Sahel Region of Burkina Faso: the CRUS (*Comité Régional des Unités de production au Sahel*). CRUS was created in 1990, in order to establish an institutional framework for the distribution of cereals in the Sahel Region, a region which suffers a constant cereal deficit. CRUS is the result of an initiative taken by the Dutch/Belgian/British NGO, ACORD, which has worked in the Seno province since 1983. ACORD has supported and facilitated contacts with other external donors, and is currently withdrawing. CRUS is currently trying to "stand on its own feet" as, from the start, the idea was that it should develop into a sustainable institution, able to function without being dependent upon foreign assistance. CRUS consists of nearly 600 village groupements, organized in 23 Unions, grouped in 4 provincial committees, the CPUS, and finally with the CRUS as the central coordinating unit in Dori.

The picture described above does not, however, completely reflect reality. The majority of the 600 groupements are *de facto* non-existent. Of the 23 Unions, only two are economically active. The CPUS only exist on paper. And the direction of CRUS is very divided and rather unaccountable to the rest of the organization.

The two active unions, UGVO (*Union des Groupements Villageois de Oudalan*) and UGVA (*Union des Groupements Villageois de Arbinda*) have been successful in establishing contacts with donors and have acquired a reputation for considerable professionalism within the grain trade, thus providing a number of *groupements* with food at highly competitive prices, in an area where grain traders have been able to make large profits due to the extreme scarcity of food in critical periods. These two unions, however, operate autonomously of the Dori-based CRUS

direction, and have their own contacts with external donors. UGVO is headed by the president of CRUS. There are, however, serious problems between him and the Dori-based General Secretary and his entourage. UGVO is comprised of big cattle owners from the town of Gorom Gorom, who control a large part of the huge cattle market on Thursdays (much more important than the one in Dori). They are, in other words, among the most economically powerful people in the Oudalan Province, and the extension of business within the grain trade has not been unfamiliar to them. The president of UGVO has strong links with European donor agencies; he has been successfully involved in campaigns in Europe against EU beef exports to West African coastal markets (a cause that brought him to Denmark in 1993), and donors seem to have a certain confidence in him. He lives, however, in Tinidja, 112 km from Dori in a rather remote village, and it is hard for him to keep up to date with the doings of the Dori- based leadership. UGVO is therefore increasingly working autonomously from the CRUS, through the direct linkages they have with foreign donors.

The same patterns emerge with UGVA. Arbinda is a town 100 km west of Dori on the Djibo road. There are no less than 5 Unions in the town. One was started by a young man with affiliations to the famous Yatenga-based NGO 6S in Ouahigouya. He started forming *Naam groupements* in Arbinda and in surrounding villages, promoting the construction of *diguettes* and mobilizing small credits. The union, however, broke up, as he was, according to the ones breaking away, "always trying to control things". The protesters were, on the other hand, accused of stealing grain from the cereal bank. They have now created their own union. A third union was created as a union of cattle owners, in collaboration with a dynamic CRPA agent in order to attract support for credits and vaccines. And finally the Red Cross created a Women's Union at a time when they had certain activities going on in the Arbinda Area. UGVA was, however, the only Union undertaking any concrete activities. Like UGVO they consist of local chiefs, the rich etc. And like UGVO they were able to circumvent the Dori-based CRUS leadership.

It seems that the reasons why these two Unions are successful are that:

- They consist of some of the richest and most skilled local businessmen;
- They have managed to keep activities among a well defined group of people;
- They have gained confidence with donors outside Dori, and have been able to establish links with them.

What is wrong with the CRUS direction in Dori? A simple answer to this question was given by Birabia, the rich trader mentioned above: *"Ces sont des escrocs"*. Or by a friend of mine: *"C'est les vieux faux types de Dori"*. At the OXFAM office in Ouagadougou, staff said that they were the worst case of mismanagement of donor funds that they had ever experienced: not even the most elemental accounting, reporting, or even showing up at meetings with international partners. As it will be shown below the secretary general had been brought to court and accused by the government-based FEER (*Fonds de l'Eau et de l'Equipement Rural*) of embezzlement. Millions of CFA and tonnes of millet were not accounted for. I met a Dutch delegation of six, who had come to Dori with a proposal to finance a series of activities. They were, however, frustrated, because nobody showed up at the meeting convened.

We are, in other words, very far from the model initially thought out, where ACORD should gradually withdraw, and CRUS should take over, running the NGO as an increasingly

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autonomous local organization, independent of external assistance. CRUS has instead developed into a mechanism for enriching a few leaders, because of lack of rigidity on the part of the donor agencies, who have taken the very rhetoric-rich documents of CRUS too much at face value. There has been very little sanctioning of the CRUS by the donors when insufficient accounting and the like has occurred, and there has been too little awareness of reports being made which merely pay lip-service to donor agencies by stressing what is deemed as fashionable within development discourse. Atampugre (1997) is rightly concerned that the disengagement of ACORD might not lead to an "independent" and sustainable CRUS. This is, however, an underestimation of the drive within the leadership of CRUS to run CRUS to benefit their own personal interests. Certain members of the leadership have apparently not seen a discrepancy between prioritizing personal interests and running a non-profit, non-political organization. And it is pertinent to ask whether it at any time has been realistic to expect that the leadership of CRUS should work actively to become "independent", as this would mean an end to the supply of capital which they have easily been able to seize control of.

4.4.3.1. Pag la Yiri

The CRUS-story resembles the story of Pag-la-Yiri in the Boulgou province. Pag la Yiri is a women's organization created in 1975 by Monique Kabore, who is the founding president of the organisation. She is, furthermore, a member of the second chamber of the parliament, and she is now based in Ouagadougou. During my stay in Zabré in the far south of Burkina Faso, where Pag-la-Yiri is based, both president and vice president were constantly absent even though there was an important meeting with an international delegation headed by representatives from the World Bank on the second day of my stay.

When investigating Pag La Yiri and their activities, one is immediately faced with the methodological problems mentioned in Chapter One: the interviewer is a potential donor, and the members of Pag La Yiri see no interest in becoming "self-reliant". The women of Pag-la-Yiri gave a good and dynamic impression when answering the questions. One woman stood up at a meeting I attended, where an international delegation headed by people from the World Bank came to visit the association, and said that the mere fact that she spoke freely now in front of all these people was a sign of the emancipating influence the association had had. She furthermore emphasized that the association "had enabled them to work autonomously of the CRPA, autonomously of the state and now they knew how to avoid getting AIDS and had learned about family planning." A surprising familiarity with what donors like to hear, especially donors favouring the privatization of state institutions, and the correlation between population growth and environmental degradation.

The organisational strategy and philosophy of Pag la Yiri are broad and not very concrete, valuing traditional solidarity and mutual aid, a qualitative transformation of society for the benefit of the women, the elderly, the children, etc.

General objectives include: Improving the quality of life of the rural populations, promoting the blossoming of women (sic!), encouraging women's participation, improving their traditional economic activities, integrating women into the modern spheres of production, helping women's access to education, reinforcing solidarity and mutual aid systems, and improving the relations

between men and women within the families. Very ambitious and at the same time, as noted in CRUS's case, lacking in any concrete strategy.

The activities of the organization likewise cover virtually all aspects of "development", divided in their own presentation, into three categories of activities, communitary activities, social activities and economic activities.

Communitary activities include: collective fields, construction of anti-erosive dikes (diguettes), wells, composting, creation of nurseries, individual as well as collective reforestations, plus information about the need for anti-erosion measures.

Social activities include literacy campaigns, health education, nutritional education, food aid, construction of latrines, maternities, informing about AIDS, creating pharmacies, organizing health workers and creating weaving and pottery workshops.

Economic activities, that have as their objective to render the organisation more financially autonomous, and also the women *vis-à-vis* their husbands, include:
a petrol station, a bar, commercialisation of agricultural produce, the sale of gathered natural resources, transformation of natural and agricultural produce (production of oils, soap, juice), cereal banks, village nurseries, grain mills, small village shops, dry season gardening, fattening of small ruminants, small savings cooperatives and credit schemes, and an organisation lorry.

As one can see a very wide range of activities requiring the vigorous management of large funds. Upon closer scrutiny, these activities were in fact defunct. Finally, it is highly questionable for how long the ones that function will continue, as the means to reinvest in logistics were not available.

It appeared that the organisation was going through a period of financial crisis. After an initial phase where the organisation had received substantial support from a number of international NGOs, of which the most important was the Swiss *"Frères des Hommes"*, the organisation seemed to have lost credibility because ofits inability to manage the funds that had been granted to them. The Association is currently being supported through a Swiss support programme, but not to the extent it was before. And donor agencies in Ouagadougou talk openly about a lack of *"pedagogie d'argent"* and the incapacity to produce a clear vision of where the association is going.

The response to this problem is interesting. An auto-evaluation was made, depicting some of the shortcomings of the organisation's program so far, and a plan was made, outlining objectives for the future and estimating the costs. This was stressed again and again, as if to prove that the organisation had gone through a *"responsabilisation"*. The sponsoring institution, *"Frères des Hommes"* had vehemently recommended this.

The self-evaluation is, however, not very informative as to the results of the different training programmes. These have, according to the evaluation, all been useful and the only way to distinguish any difference in the level of success is the fact that a few activities are highlighted as especially successful. No concrete reasons for this are given. Furthermore a direct link is made between training activities and an alleged increase in agricultural surplus, but this is not

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quantified, which would have been interesting. There is an implicit assumption that the training automatically leads to changed behavioural and production patterns, thus ignoring the forms of appropriation of the development initiative which are often central parts of self-evaluations.

In general, the auto-evaluation cannot be said to be an evaluation *per se*. It is mainly a repetition of the objectives of the activities of the association, plus some more general thoughts about certain difficulties in their execution. There is a general lack of quantifiable data concerning what has actually been done. This is, admittedly, also difficult to find, but it makes the report jump to doubtful conclusions like, for instance, that the firewood consumption has gone down because of introduction of stoves, which has increased humus cover, etc.

The evaluation only states thenumber of training activities but reveals nothing about their quality. This is a very common shortcoming when it comes to training programmes; a lack of reflection about the utility of the training, and the ill-founded assumption that training in itself will change rural people's behavioural patterns automatically, notwithstanding the way the training is conducted. Again ,the forms of appropriation, and the deconstruction and selection of the development packages are not discussed.

When questioning villagers about the training it was often stated that the women of Pag La Yiri "Came from Zabré and told us a lot of things about the need to organize". This was by some villagers deemed a waste of time, as this information revealed nothing new. Others stated that "even though we know it all already there is no harm in having it repeated." But again, it was unanimously stated that it was the provision of logistics which was considered the most valuable assistance.

The quality of the training was, however, a central point of critique from CRPA, who openly contested the superficial way Pag-la-Yiri conducted their extension activities. This critique, on the other hand, should be weighed against the fact that these two institutions are in potential competition for external resources for this purpose.

The Pag-la-Yiri five year plan is an equally weak document. More than a plan, it is a description of a number of features of rural society and a shopping list of activities that the association would like external agents to finance.

The execution of activities is not specified in detail. Instead some general explanations are given as to why certain activities are important, but their linkages are not always evident; their purpose is implicitly assumed (trees should be planted to improve soil fertility, reduce degradation and secure fuelwood supplies; men should be educated so that the workload of the women be reduced, etc.)

The implementation costs of the plan are also unrealistic. 5,3 *billion* CFA is the estimated cost, of which 3,9 billion is to come from external sources and 1,4 billion is to be mobilized within the organization. Both contributions seem extremely ambitious.

After a short period where Pag La Yiri constituted an important source of capital in the remote Zabré area it seems valid to conclude that the association suffers the same problems as depicted by Maclure and Atampugre. The minute donor fundings disappear things start falling apart. It is,

however, very doubtful that a more careful "matching to the absorptive and managerial capacity" of Pag La Yiri (to use Atampugre's expression) would have promoted greater sustainability. In fact, addressing the urge for sustainability in a case like this might be missing the point. And in many ways the association has been successful. It has given jobs to a number of "animateurs" and Mme. Kaboré now has her seat in the Second Chamber.

Pag la Yiri is now waiting for donors to return after these planning assessment exercises. In a sense, this is another example of the "cargo cult" effects of development intervention. Christoplos (1994b) refers to cases where local NGOs have made similar self-assessments, whereafter they were shocked to see that after the not too positive results of these, the aid was suspended. The local NGO had thought that when they had made such an assessment, disbursements could also be expected to continue. "For them the assessment was a ritual which would bring, not repel the cargo. (..) their training had been a form of initiation, whereby they had learned to perform these rituals" (Christoplos, 1994b p. 11).

4.4.3.2. A new look at NGOs?

There is a need to change the way we look at these NGOs. To look at them as "the resurgence of civil society" may not be the most fruitful approach. It seems more fruitful to look at them as what Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan have termed "development brokers" (Olivier de Sardan 1995). In this connection, it is important to stress what Boissevain (1974) said about brokers: that in order to function effectively as such, one has to withhold information from the actors between whom the brokers are intermediating.

It is, furthermore, debateable as to whether this pluralizing of the development apparatus and the entry of the NGOs on the development scene has led to greater transparency, higher quality aid and more participatory development projects. The examples of CRUS and Pag la Yiri seem to suggest that this pluralization may instead open up a new type of clientilism, where mastery of developmentalist jargon is an essential tool.

At this point it is worth noting that CRUS and Pag La Yiri are by no means considered as failures within NGO-work in Burkina Faso. Quite the contrary! CRUS and Pag la Yiri are in fact seen as some of the more interesting attempts to establish grass-roots organizations, not only in Burkina Faso, but in the whole of West Africa, and at several conferences that I have been to, these two institutions have been highlighted as especially interesting. After having looked into what they have done more thoroughly (but by no means exhaustively), a quite depressing picture emerges of the NGO scene in West Africa, if these are to be seen as the success stories of the region.[15]

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[15]   An interesting event occurred in early 1999, when all of a sudden I ran into an old acquaintance from the time when I lived in Senegal (1989-92) at the CDR in Copenhagen. He was at the CDR attending a seminar, as the "Nature and Society-theme" had arranged a session where people were to come up with examples of success stories from rural development in Africa. My Senegalese friend had found an interesting case from West Africa - Pag la Yiri. His knowledge of the organization was however limited to meetings with the leadership, talks with observers and written documents.

A final point. The idea of NGOs somehow being more "locally grounded" or "sustainable" by virtue of their non-state status seems founded on normative assumptions of development thinkers rather than on empirical evidence. It stems from a belief that there is a clear distinction to be made between "state" and "non-state" institutions, plus that the former are by nature more inefficient.

The ideas behind the DANIDA projects that greater efficiency and sustainability can be ensured through contracting NGOs is not based on experiences from the field, but on assumptions as to what would be good development. And, furthermore, they seem to be assumptions devoid of a more serious analysis of what is meant by efficiency and sustainability.

4.4.4 Development Institutions At Village Level

Ferguson (1998) cautions us not to operate with a rigid topography of development, where the village "level" always ranks lowest, and the state level in Ouagadougou highest. This topographic discourse tends to place our development thinking within certain institutional frameworks that are unintentionally incompatible with "local" ways of conceiving social change. A typical example of this could be overemphasizing the nation state as an institution through which social mobilization can be organized.

When it nevertheless seems to make sense to make an analysis of institutions on village level, this is because the village is often targeted as the social structure at which development is aimed.

Only quite recently has it become accepted in academic as well as development spheres that the African village is not necessarily indigenously egalitarian, an example of a primitive communism. Belloncle's (1980) idea that the egalitarian structure of West African villages constituted a vital triumph for the peasants, as this enabled the creation of strong peasants' associations, has been effectively refuted (Bayart 1989, Olivier de Sardan 1995). Two things, however, remain vital: The idea is still alive within development discourse (the World Bank boldly states that creation of farmers associations in Africa can effectively contribute to giving the means for action as "L'action collective est profondement ancrée dans la tradition des sociétés Africaines" (World Bank 1989:123)) Second, the thing is that it is interesting how Belloncle could reach this conclusion at all. Two decades later, it seems obvious to look at rural West African societies as gerontocratic and hierarchical, emphasizing the knowledgeability of the social actor and the power relations he/she has to live with. Belloncle, however, did meticulous fieldwork; how could he reach conclusions that seem so obviously erroneous today?

It is with these reservations in mind that the analysis of village institutions is to be made. The DANIDA projects do not operate in an institutional void. There is a long tradition of organization of rural populations in Burkina Faso. The "Comité de Gestion de Terroir" of the project is not the only attempt to organize the villagers. Historically, it has always been a condition for connection with external agents (parastatals, state institutions, extension services, development aid) that a village be organized in some kind of cooperative institution. Virtually all Burkina Faso villages have a "Groupement", organized by the encadreur and with a formal legal status. These groupements have served as the institutional framework through which credits have been directed, which has in many cases reduced their legitimacy in the eyes of the villagers, as groupement leaders have gotten away with not reimbursing their debts, thus impeding others from obtaining credit. With credit schemes vanishing and agricultural input provision privatized, the large

majority of these groupements are virtually non-existent, undertaking no activities, and without any dynamism if not brought to life by external funding agencies. A farmer stated that "we have the groupement in order to attract aid. Therefore the unity within the groupement is important, if you don't show unity, the donor will find another village." This quotation quite well shows how far we are from the Rochdale-model of the farmers' cooperative, where peasants unite to confront outside usurpers in egalitarian solidarity. Laurent (1996) describes the same mechanism. A villager tells how, after having successfully obtained a credit for purchasing donkey carts, the neighbouring villages come to them to ask how they did it. They then tell them to organize in groupements and make demands as groups to the donors. A villager in Boulgou told me that "the problem in our village is that we don't know how to attract the people of development. We have created *groupements*, but it does not help."

In principle, the CRPA has its agents in every village in Burkina Faso. As mentioned earlier, every village has an *"encadreur"*, or extension officer, covering between 10 to 15 villages. This officers job is to assist the farmers, through the *groupement*, in learning how to apply new agricultural techniques and come up with advice as to how to use "new" inputs and technologies like animal traction, fertilizers, pesticides and fungicides. Following problems with bad management of funds, (and ideological assumptions on the part of the World Bank), the supply and commercialization of these inputs are however no longer part of the CRPA staff's responsibility, they are to be taken care of by private traders. The *encadreur* is now only supposed to pass on information and carry out training.

The *encadreurs* constitute an important link between the state institutions and the farmers. Unlike with project- and NGO-intervention, there has been a certain continuity in the farmer/*encadreur* relationship, and especially in the south of Burkina Faso, where cash crops are more widespread, the *encadreur* has played an important role in farmers' commercial endeavours. Earlier the *encadreur* also apparently played a role as facilitator of access to animal vaccines. Furthermore, the relationship between *encadreurs* and farmers are according to my own investigations rarely hostile. A problem is that the current way the *encadrement* is run by the World Bank PRSAP-project is very expensive, and the *encadreur* is, as mentioned, left without much to offer the farmers.

Another more unpopular local institution is the *"paysan forestier"*, existing in every village. As mentioned above, the *"Service de l'Environnement"* has the mandate to control and sanction the illicit cutting of trees in the countryside. They therefore appoint a local villager who is responsible for reporting violators of the rules to the Service, who will thereafter issue a fine. The *"Paysan Forestier"* then receives a percentage of this fine. The *"paysan forestier"* is also responsible for a nursery, which in the Dori area functions very badly. The *"paysan forestier"* laments that after planting the seedlings, there are no means to assure that the young trees are not eaten immediately by goats, which makes their efforts a little pointless. The *"paysan forestier"* is in a very delicate position between the unpopular *Service de l'Environnement* and his fellow villagers. According to certain sources he is often very unpopular, and he is often a young farmer, who after a certain time as *paysan forestier* eventually migrates. Many farmers in fact refuse to be nominated *paysan forestier*, as they do not wish to challenge their relationship with their fellow villagers, even though the position may be economically beneficial.

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The organization of the project's *Comités de Gestion de Terroir* can be explained in part by the relatively meagre impact of the *groupements*. But a number of other initiatives have been taken to organize the villagers, mainly with the objective of creating institutions capable of channelling external aid. With the pluralization of Burkinan society, a number of NGOs have created village associations and have been relatively successful in claiming that these *groupements* reflect a more genuine organization at " grass-roots" level than those recognized by the government institutions. The most significant initiative of this kind in the Sahelian Burkina Faso is the above mentioned organization of *Groupements Villageois* under the umbrella organization CRUS, grouping together more than 600 *Groupements* in the four Sahelian provinces of Burkina Faso, these groupement again being organized in 26 unions. However, these unions and *groupements* are only visible when they have succeeded in getting some kind of external funding. The CRUS has, furthermore, recently faced severe management problems, as mentioned above.

The villages of Burkina Faso have systems of chieftaincy with different degrees of legitimacy and power. Each village has a *chef de village*, who was the mediator between the colonial power and the village, one reason why the title is traditionally not very popular. In an attempt to break with the past and with "traditional" power structures, a new institution, the *"délégué"* was introduced by the Sankara regime. The *délégué* was supposed to work alongside the *"Comités pour la Défense de la Révolution"* with the implementation of the new acts initiated along with the change of regime. In the countryside this especially had significance in the implementation of the RAF, the *"Reforme Agraire Foncière"*, in which traditional claims to land were deemed illegitimate, causing certain movements of populations towards the south where especially *Mossi* people from the densely populated Plateau moved to new areas claiming land under to the new legislation.

In the Dori area these institutions are very weak. The *Comités pour la Défense de la Révolution* have vanished, the *chef de village* has most often been replaced by the *délégué*, and even the *délégué* is not necessarily in a very powerful position, serving mainly as the mediator between the government agencies and the village. As this most often entails little else than attending meetings in Dori, the post as *délégué* is not always one in which large resources are invested. In one of the villages visited, Pétécolé, it was said that the *délégué* had been chosen by the villagers because "he was in Dori all the time anyway". Apart from these formal institutions there is normally a religious setup of *imams* with a certain influence, and often a number of competing clans within the village or competing *quartiers* within the village.

All these local institutions are, however, living a silent life but are characterized by being instruments that can be revitalized if donors are on the lookout for institutions that they can attach their development assistance to. How these conflicts are played out can be illustrated by two examples from the villages of Boudoungél and Kachirga, near Dori.

4.5 Case 1 - The village of Boudoungél

Boudoungél is a village roughly 15 km east of Dori, consisting of *fulanis* and their former slaves, the *rimaybé*. Everybody in the village is somehow family related, and are all called Diallo. There are roughly 800 inhabitants. The inhabitants are mainly agro-pastoralists, and have strong links with the town of Dori. A large portion of the younger male inhabitants have migrated, mainly to Ouagadougou or Cote d'Ivoire. Since the revolution, the *"Chef du village"* has not enjoyed the

power he used to and problems within the village are now mainly settled through the *délégué*, the person appointed as the village government representative, and through calling upon authorities in Dori.

In Boudoungél there is a *groupement villageois* recognized by the CRPA, a *groupement* organized by CRUS and a *Comité de gestion de Terroir*, organized by the DANIDA project.

Between the two *groupements* there is a considerable straddling and contingency. They have the same president, the famous (notorious) DD, who is General Secretary of CRUS and livesg in Dori, and is the brother of the *délégué*. DD has had connections with influential people in Dori and Ouagadougou, and has thereby been able to mobilize funds for credits, earlier through USAID financing, and recently through the Government-run FEER (*Fonds de l'Eau et de l'Equipement Rural*). The considerable FEER-credits, around 60 portions, were however granted very selectively and, according to certain sources, only 5 households in fact benefitted. Furthermore, FEER has severe problems with the repayments of the credits; DD has not only taken large commissions in disbursing the credits, he has allegedly also pocketed money that villagers have reimbursed, and FEER has now taken DD to court. He is, however, backed by influential people in Dori, in particular the mayor.

In Boudoungél, however, certain people were unsatisfied with the way the FEER credits were managed, and therefore a small group was established opposing the *groupements,* and at the same time finding support with the DANIDA project *animateur*, who was aware of DD's strong and weak points, and therefore eager to establish a CGT outside a DD-influenced framework. The *animateur* thus willingly admits that this group is maybe not "representative", but on the other hand, he says that it is easy to work with. This group, led by a certain DB, one of the richest villagers, controls what is considered the most important asset of the project; the relatively modest credit line. This has led Mr. DD to try to persuade the project director of the DANIDA project to drop this new group as the core of the CGT, claiming that they are drug addicts (sic), which, however, does not seem to be the case. This attempt to monopolize the project activities has failed. The current situation is, thus, a *modus vivendi*, where there seems to be a general acceptance in the two camps that they "divide the cake" like it has been done. The credits of FEER - much bigger than the DANIDA-credits, are in the eyes of the involved villagers a one-time event, not likely to be repeated (or reimbursed), so there is no need to have hard feelings. The DANIDA credits are, on the other hand, rather insignificant, and not worth creating too much of a fuss about.

4.6 Case 2 - The village of Katchirga

Katchirga is a village situated roughly 20 km from Dori, 5 km. from Boudoungél. Here, things have developed somehow more dramatically. Katchirga is a large village, with roughly 2000 inhabitants, and with moreserious divisions, it is known as a "*village compliqué*" by the Dori-based development projects.

During the Sankara Revolution in 1983, a "*Comité pour la Défense de la Révolution*", led by the current *Délégué* and an important local trader and tailor, AO, seized power over the traditional "*Chef de Village*", a very autocratic leader. This caused a certain division in the village between the clan around the chief and the new leaders. The chief died in the late 80s. The CDR long gone,

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the *délégué* and AO have maintained power, but the sons of the old chief are involved in a bitter conflict with them, a conflict that has been fuelled by the intervention of development institutions. DD has also provided credits to Katchirga, more than 100 portions, most of 120.000 CFA each, (certain only 20.000 for fattening of small ruminants), and in Katchirga it was AO who decided who was to benefit from these credits. According to himself and the *délégué*, this selection was based on the ability of the adherents to reimburse and to come up with a plan for investments and reimbursements. However according to other sources only about ten compounds have received credits according to their relatioship with AO, everybody in these compounds has received ("*même les femmes en ont recu*", as an angry supporter of the other camp noted), reimbursements are extremely low, DD has taken large commissions, and has furthermore not reimbursed credits, people have trusted him as middleman.

AO is also in control of the CGT. The project *animateur* apparently tried to affiliate the other group, based the old *chef du village's* family, but without success, they backed out after an initial attempt. The credit lines of the DANIDA project are thus controlled by the small group of people arouns AO.

Recently, this conflict has taken a dramatic turn. The *délégué* has gained control of the board in charge of the management of the school, and has started using school logistics for alternative purposes. This has caused the temporary closure of the school as the majority of the parents have withdrawn their children. Now the opposing forces in the village are increasingly trying to involve outside powers to mediate the conflict.

The delegue, however, has apparently done this for some time. Through a broker he has bought himself protection from the politician Sanda Dicko, who has very close ties with the Dori-based MP Ismaël Diallo. Furthermore, they are on good terms with DD, who enjoys a certain protection from the mayor.

This makes it difficult for the sons of the late village chief. They call upon the *prefet*, but he is unable to act against someone protected by Sanda and the mayor. Furthermore they have called the attention of Nassirou Dicko, a leader of a credit union, and at the same time local leader of PAI, a leading opposition party. Nassirou has family connections in Katchirga, and though a member of the opposition, also has the trust of the mayor. Nassirou claims to be working for the family of the chief out of indignation, which is very likely as this is not contrary to nourishing political campaigns. But he apparently does not have the power to force changes. Getting support from the political leaders in Dori requires substantial means that the traditional leaders of Katchirga apparently do not have.

4.7 Association and power

What are the interesting things to be learned from these two cases? First of all, that the project activities enter a battlefield of political power, not a homogenous village that has no institutions that deal with natural resource management. Second, that the project immediately becomes an instrument in the hands of the different political opponents. Third, it is interesting to see that certain dichotomies and systems of categorization do not seem to be valid in this case. The

"modern" local power (the *délégué*) gets protection from leaders that are traditional (but at the same time representatives of the state, the traditional leaders (The sons of the late chief) go to the opposition and to the *prefet*. The dichotomy modern/traditional seems very difficult to purport, but can be reinvented in case of new conflicts in an opportunistic setting. Finally, the villain in the eyes of the northern development projects, DD, straddles shrewdly between a number of social actors, all with their interests to pursue.And how do we draw the line between civil society and the state in these particular cases? Finally the dichotomy often held as necessary if the development is to succeed, between development and politics, seems hard to uphold. The project chief technical advisor of the German PSB-project claimed that it was essential to keep local politics out of the activities of the projects, "what the mayor does has nothing to do with development". If however you treat issues like credit and natural resource management as outside the political spheres, the result is likely to be limited as evaluations of the different PSB-projects also show.

Graphically we can show the way the PSB/DANIDA project is inserted into the Dori institutional framework in the following way:
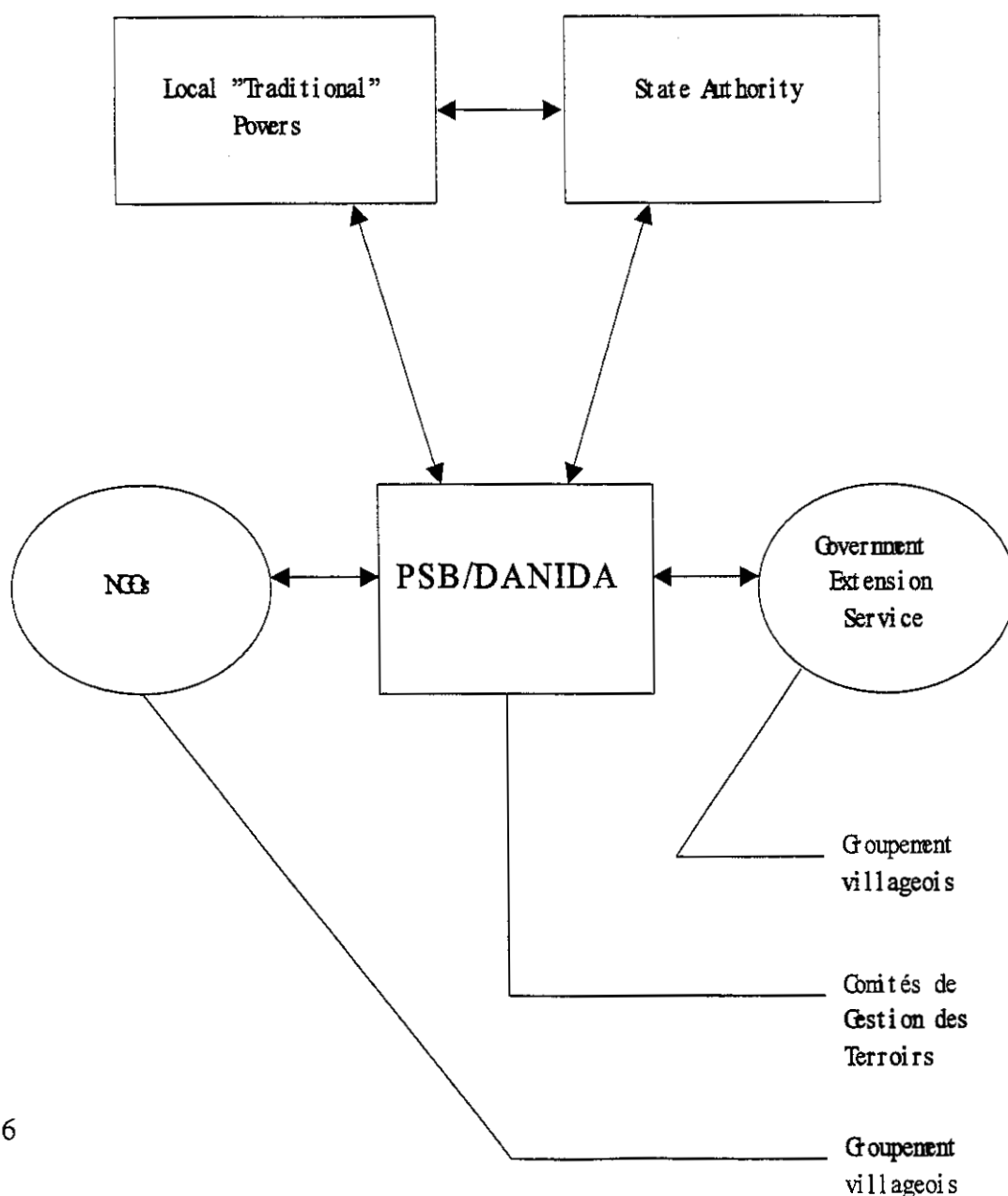
This table is meant to indicate the institutional framework within which a project like PSB/Danida is inserted. I have chosen to place the project in the middle, the state at the top and the villagers at the bottom of the figure, in order not to create unnecessary confusion. I should equally have extended the use of arrows to connect all of the boxes, which would have been more correct, but at the expense of aesthetics. An arrow between the NGO box and the traditional power box would also have been suitable.

As one can see, and as mentioned above, it is very hard to distinguish between what is "state" and what is "society" or "civil society". Furthermore it is difficult to operate at any given institutional "level", as networking goes on beyond these spatial categories. It is also difficult to speak of any specific space wherein power is exercised.

In the Boulgou province it was neither exclusively the government that had tried to organize villagers in *groupements*. Pag-la-Yiri and a smaller NGO, Dakupa had equally tried to organize villagers. It, however, seems that their highly acclaimed more participatory and "grass-roots" approach does not differ significantly from more top-down approaches in the eyes of the villagers. On the contrary, it was at times stated that "those people talked too much", but apparently had difficulties in providing more concrete improvements.

As noted by Olivier de Sardan, (1999) village institutions are often extremely weak and lack legitimacy. Institutions like the *"chef du village"* and the *"délégué"* are associated with the government, which is often best avoided, and institutions like the *groupements* are associated with projects, whose objectives remain obscure for the villagers. In times when external support declines, their importance therefore diminishes as well. The coexisting of these institutions at village level normally does not create problems. Villagers often adapt a "sweeping the conflicts under the carpet"-strategy (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 1998), because people are more or less doomed to stay together: conflicts are downplayed (especially in accounts to foreigners); systems of recompensation are encouraged; and in Seno conflicts are often solved by people moving to other places, or deliberately migrating. Village institutions are often useful instruments in internal village conflicts, where competing groups of villagers might use the *groupement* of a given project or NGO to strengthen their own power base. One therefore often sees that local conflicts between different groups in a village are enhanced or played out through these institutions, and the arrival of a new external agent at times triggers off a struggle about who will benefit from this new intervention.

4.8 Project intervention at village level

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the DANIDA projects intervene at village level in the training and establishment of village committees, credit, soil- and water conservation measures and water supplies. In the following I shall further examine the different activities, emphasizing the soil and water conservation measures, as I find them especially revelatory as an example of the complex relations between donors and recipients.

The two DANIDA projects have both had a very slow start, as it has been a primary objective of both of the projects to assure that a thorough diagnosis of the problems was made and that solutions to them were proposed in a way which would be sustainable and at the same time participatory. As a matter of fact this has meant that the Boulgou project only embarked upon

more concrete activities very recently, after my visits to Burkina Faso. This new phase follows a very long "*phase diagnostique*", which caused some frustration among the farmers, who asked me politely if the project was never going tostop asking questions and start aiding the villagers.

The Seno project also had a slow start, as it was seen as essential to make a thorough diagnosis of what the problems were before outlining a policy for natural resource management in the region. Furthermore, certain experiments were carried out, using new agricultural techniques which were seen as promising, especially the cultivation of water plants in a lake near Dori for fodder production (An experiment which eventually turned out unfeasible). And finally work was done to work out a "*zonage*" of the project territory in order to help create the most adequate local institutions for the management of the natural resources. A long "*phase diagnostique*" was followed by an abrupt change. The Project had a new CTA with an entirely different approach. He found it ridiculous to go on for years without arriving at concrete activities and therefore forced through a number of activities. After two years he was succeeded by the present leadership and no foreign leader has been in charge of the project since 1994.

In trying to answer the problem raised roughly 100 pages ago concerning how to assess the impact of a project like the PSB/Danida, I shall in the following pages look more thoroughly into perhaps the most important activity of the project, namely *diguette* construction. The construction of the *diguettes* constitutes an interesting example of the difficulties of assessing impacts, but it also pinpoints a more fundamental problem involved in aid assessment, namely the positivist point of departure of many of the assessments, which hinder a more hermeneutical, historical and discourse-oriented approach to the analysis of development (Marcussen & Reenberg 1999).

4.9 An example: *Diguette* construction at the PSB/DANIDA project

The construction of *diguettes* in Burkina Faso has been one of the main soil conservation activities promoted by development agencies, governmental and non-governmental alike, ever since the desertification question came up in the seventies (Reij et al. 1996). The *diguettes* have, however, rarely been analysed as anything other than a soil and water conservation measure, and are also seen as such by the Danish projects. In the following I shall go into more detail concerning this question of *diguette* construction as it provides a revelatory example of the donor/recipient interface and the different logics that are confronted when a development project is initiated. It becomes a concrete example of how the interpretation of the notions onto which a development project is built leads to unintended and unanticipated results, and I find it is a good entry point to a more critical review of some of these central notions.

4.9.1 *Diguette* construction in Burkina Faso

Diguettes are lines of stones placed in fields along contour lines with the aim of braking overland water flow and encouraging the deposition of sediment upslope (Batterbury, 1997). *Diguette* construction is fairly simple and cheap, but very labour demanding. The construction of *diguettes* can ,however, take place in the dry season at times when other agricultural activities are at a halt, where labour is normally relatively abundant. *Diguettes* have become quite widespread in rural Burkina Faso in the course of the last two decades, especially in the central densely-populated *Mossi* Plateau.

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Diguette construction has been seen by many development projects as an effective answer to reverting the degradation of agricultural drylands, and even of recuperating degraded soils in rural Burkina Faso. It is, however, a daunting task to estimate more precisely to what extent these initiatives are effective in rendering more sustainable the land use or boosting the yields. On-farm trials have been very difficult to undertake, as precise measurements of the yields before the construction of dikes are generally not available, yields differ from of year to year because of erratic rainfall and all sorts of other contingencies (workforce availability, manure availability, insect attacks, theft, animal intrusion, fire etc.), which makes more precise estimates very difficult. In Burkina Faso a number of attempts have been made (For a thorough review see Batterbury, 1997). Gubbels (1994) cites what he terms "informal evaluation", indicating that the construction of *diguettes* on this project in the Yatenga Province in the northwest had improved yields by 40 % on treated versus untreated fields. Other tests (cited in Atampugre, 1993) show increases of between 12 and 64 %. It is, however, very difficult to make a *ceteris paribus* estimate. At the same time there seems to be agreement that more time has to pass in order to be able to assess more long-term impacts of *diguettes.*

The most thorough analyses have been made under the auspices of Chris Reij, and the results are summarized in a World Bank Paper (Critchley, Reij & Seznec, 1992). This report notes that earth bunds promoted in the seventies were a failure, while the introduction of stone bunds in the eighties was a "success story." Whereas approximately 150 hectares were treated in 1982/83, this had jumped to an estimated 5000 hectares in the dry season of 1987/88, farmers "engaging voluntarily in the field." This report estimates an overall yield improvement of 40 % the first year after construction. The 40 % increase is estimated through measuring treated fields vs. non-treated fields.

Certain estimates have been made in the nineties in connection with the "Six-S"-NGO based in Yatenga and financed partly by DanChurchAid (Seddon & Kafando, 1996). These estimates state that a difference of between 15 and 165% has been observed between treated and untreated fields. Nothing is, however, revealed as to how these measurements have been made, neither are we told much about what the yield would have been on the treated field if the *diguettes* had not been constructed. In their discussion of the *diguettes* they largely refer to Atampugre.

In the course of the eighties, and on into the nineties, *diguettes* develop into one of the most widespread forms of natural resource management support from international donors to Burkina Faso farmers. Long-term assessments of yield impacts have, however, not been made yet (Batterbury, 1997). Furthermore, it is worth noting that investigations rarely take into account that *certain actors have no interest in proving that they are not effective*, a point that shall be dealt with below. There are, however, numerous accounts of farmers and *animateurs* praising the *diguettes*, "With *diguettes*, we renew our hopes", "the suffering (of constructing them) is worthwhile" , "everybody now ventures to Mr. Ouedraogo's farm to see his *diguettes*" etc. And project aid-workers likewise often refer to the farmers' interest when justifying *diguette*-construction.

However there is a concern that it seems that farmers do not continue constructing *diguettes* after a project intervention phase, even though they praise them as very helpful. Even though the *diguettes* seem to boost yields, they remain a very labourious endeavour. The transport of stones often requires the assistance of a truck as stones are often not locally available. And the work

involved in the construction of the diguettes amounts to approx. 50 person days/ha (Vlaar, cited in Batterbury 1997), depending on the given surroundings.

4.9.2 Searching for reasons for *diguette* construction

Interviews with farmers in villages where the PSB/DANIDA- project was operating made it apparent that an analysis of the relations between the farmers and the project that supported the construction of the *diguettes* was crucial. In this area, farmers were seemingly much less enthusiastic regarding the *diguettes* than they were said to be in the central and Southern part of the country, and than they had been in the Boulgou area earlier during my fieldwork there. Again there might be obvious explanations, that I was not able to quantify, as this takes many years of on-farm studies, and as mentioned above is associated with a long array of methodological measurement problems. Explanations may include that:

- *diguettes* are more effective in high rainfall areas;
- *diguettes* make most sense when extensification of the cultivated area is difficult;
- *diguettes* make most sense where labour is not the principal production bottleneck.

But apart from these rather 'technical' explanations it seemed necessary to go more thoroughly into an analysis of the relations between the farmers and the development institutions promoting the *diguettes* in order to understand why they were being constructed. As Bierschenk states: "one must begin with an analysis of the project's participants and other interest groups, the goals and reasons for their negotiations, resources they have at hand – in short of their own respective projects" (Bierschenk 1988: 174).

Complicated relations prevail between the project *animateur* who was hired by the DANIDA-project in order to assist farmers in the construction of the *diguettes*, and the villagers. It is the task of the project *animateur* to create village committees that are going to deal with the management of local natural resources, according to the objectives of the DANIDA *gestion de terroirs-* project. This work includes the creation of *Comités d'Actions Spécifiques* (CAS) which are mainly established to organize *diguette* construction. The *animateur* of the project is under pressure from his boss to produce results. Successful credits disbursed and reimbursed, high numbers of truckloads of stones for *diguettes* delivered, high numbers of meetings with committees from different villages held, large numbers of training programmes executed, all these activities are signs that he does a good job. When the *animateur* of the DANIDA-project comes to a village proposing the activities of the project, he therefore usually ends up with a small group of people with whom collaboration is possible. This group might represent the people possessing a certain power in the village, or it might be an opposition minority that tries to use the project to strengthen its own situation. In order to produce results, the *animateur* is furthermore tempted to persuade the villagers to embark on the project activities, even if they do not immediately think it is a good idea.

The villagers, notwithstanding the participatory character of the project, often still fear sanctions from the project, such as they are used to if they do not comply with the government institutions like, for instance, the *Service de l'Environnement*. This results in the paradoxical situation that villagers sometimes engage in work in connection with the project when they don't see the point, or even consider it stupid. This is the case especially with the *diguettes*. The first year the truck arrives and everybody shows that they are grateful that the project intervenes, so they take off to

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collect stones. The next year people are more reluctant, it's hot and there is a baptism in the village, so they send their sons off, they have never ridden in a truck and are eager to participate in anything which disrupts everyday routines. The third year, however, the *animateur* finds it difficult to mobilize people, so he says to the villagers that if they build the *diguettes*, he will make an effort to see that the World Food Programme provides a truckload of food aid to the village. As he turns out to be unable to fulfill this promise, relations between the *animateur* and the village worsen, and he is often left with a small group of villagers constituting the *Comité de Gestion de Terroirs* and the CAS, who will then decide on credit grants and other project elements that interest people.

James Ferguson (Pers. Comm.) suggested to me that the construction of *diguettes* might be interpreted as the construction of "monuments of Development" in a society where magical notions of causality prevail. Referring to his own fieldwork in Lesotho on a rural development project making terracing for highland agriculture, he quoted a farmer's remark that "I bet that in the U.S. farmers have terraces all over the place". He had thereby gotten the idea that the construction of anti-erosive measures were not only to be seen as such but equally as a demarcation of symbolic frontiers. By adhering to these activities and following the instructions of the development project, the villagers adhere to a modernity, which for symbolic reasons is understood as a strategy to get out of their misery. The *diguette* is a symbol of their will to work actively for their development, and their will to submit themselves to people that apparently know what this development is and how to get there. Supplementing this view, P-J. Laurent (1996, p. 13), in his analysis of peasant associations among the *Mossi* in central Burkina Faso, holds that certain villagers, especially the young with the creation of their development association create a "culture of development", based on unity and conversion to Christianity. These two elements are important as they are protective against threats of witchcraft, very present in *Mossi* society. Simultaneously, they are consistent with adhering to a more "Western" discourse of modernization. Laurent is thus in line with the thinking of Ferguson, development becomes a ritual you perform to contract with external forces.

Interviewing farmers in the villages round Dori about their views on the diguettes did not directly corroborate these interesting views. Villagers were, perhaps because my interpreter had a good reputation in the villages, quite straightforward in describing benefits and inadequacies of the *diguettes*, and when questioned more thoroughly, quickly started denigrating the *diguettes*:

> *"Ouad'Allahi! We are Fulanis and we like to show other people respect so we have participated in the construction of diguettes. But these diguettes, it's really no use at all, and they can even be damaging, creating one part of the field full of sand, and another as bare laterite. They don't take into account the wind erosion"*(Older farmer in the village of Belgou).

> *"With the diguettes we can no longer control the circulation of water in the field, and we risk waterlogging. If we need to halt the runoff, we make a small dike of soil - this we have always done"* (Farmer in the village of Petecolé).

> *"The idea that diguettes should be of any use is stupid. And even if it were effective it would never be worth the very hard work of constructing them and paying for the truck."* (Farmer in village of Boudoungél.)

As one can see, no hocus pocus, but arguments based on a rationality embedded in elements like profitability, productivity and security. With such a clear rejection of the effectiveness of the diguettes as a productive measure it is tempting to conclude that they construct them to maintain contact with the project.[16]

However it seems that the *diguettes* function as "monuments of development" for certain other actors. The German anthropologist working at the *"Projet Agro-Ecologie"*, a project supporting the CRPA, stated that this project especially encouraged the construction of *diguettes*, because "Here, at least we do something concrete and visible" (as opposed to training programmes where the actual result is obviously very difficult to measure). The question as to whether it is among donors or peasants that magical notions of causality prevail may furthermore be exemplified in the training in "environmental awareness" which also faces problems on village level. An *animateur* told me that "it is very difficult to make peasants understand that it is through the planting of trees that we can increase rainfall and halt desertification." But the causal link between tree planting and rainfall is highly contestable, and is very likely to mystify the villagers further as to the capabilities of the project.

4.9.3 Opposing reasons for diguette construction

I find it revelatory to use the example of the *diguettes* to illustrate in a wider context, the villagers' positionings *vis-à-vis* development projects. If farmers are indeed rational, why do they accept the continued construction of *diguettes*? Below, I shall attempt to list a number of reasons why donors and recipients alike may have their perfectly valid reasons for this. Why do donors encourage the construction of *diguettes*? Why do they see it as a good idea? It has to do with the influence of certain development discourses prevailing within Sahelian natural resource management:

* *Diguettes* are a means to regain *sustainability*. *Diguettes* are seen as an instrument to restore an ecological equilibrium distorted by population increase and other unfortunate incidences. It is, however, highly contestable whether an ecological equilibrium ever existed within Sahelian natural resource utilization practices. What has been termed the "equilibrium paradigm" is being increasingly criticized (Mearns & Leach 1996, Scoones 1994, Hoben 1998), as being an ahistoric narrative, with no basis in realities of the past. Natural resource management practices in Burkina Faso have not passed the threshold from being sustainable to becoming unsustainable, it simply does not make sense to establish carrying capacity limits, which are the natural consequences of this line of thought.

* *Diguettes* provide a *technical* solution to the problem of development: a solution which is low-cost, locally available and need not be repaired with spare parts which are difficult to obtain. And unlike fertilizers which are imported, expensive, demand certain crop

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[16]   At this point we should however equally remember what Drinkwater (1992) said about critical hermeneutics. My interpreter and myself have certainly been spotted as suitable mediators of their discontent with certain aspects of the project, which has made them outspoken about certain elements of the project.

varieties, may damage the environment etc., *diguettes* in a pleasant way merge local and imported knowledge.

- In that sense it is furthermore an apparently *unpolitical* solution to the development problem. Anybody willing to construct *diguettes* can in principle do so, it is done during the dry season where underemployment is a fact (especially among the men). It thus reinforces the belief, very common among development workers, nationals and foreigners alike, that it is possible to separate development and politics. And in constructing *diguettes*, you apparently do not have to address issues of local power and politics.

- The construction of *diguettes* is seen as creating *growth*. Increasing yields in Sahelian agriculture is an objective which is very rarely questioned, and *diguettes* seem to constitute a local and technical solution. However, it is questionable whether farmers find it worth the toil to engage in *diguette* construction when it is easier to extend cultivated areas. An obsession with maximizing growth and productivity often conflicts with farmers' emphasis on security.

- Donors furthermore see the construction of *diguettes* as *participatory*. By mobilizing people at village level only providing the truck for the transportation and introducing the very simple technology of *diguette* constructing, the activity lives up to a number of ideals often stressed as important: it deals with a target group which is difficult to reach without providing very costly solutions to local problems.

- *Diguettes* are *visible*. Training programmes, credits etc. leave the development worker with the unpleasant and not unrealistic feeling that three years of toil in a dusty town of Northern Burkina might not have made a great impact. With *diguettes* his project has a perfect example of an *impact* which can be shown to evaluation missions and others looking for justifications to prolong the project.

And why do farmers want to establish contacts with development projects?

- The adherence to the construction of *diguettes* creates *dependency vis-à-vis* the project. Unless a project is clearly detrimental, one might argue that a farmer has little interest in providing a critique of it. It seems to me to be important to pay sufficient attention to the fact that there is a strong urge among farmers to adhere to *'assistencialism'* (Olivier de Sardan, 1995: 136), as this is their only linkage to external agencies and 'development'. By *assistencialism* I mean a desire on the part of the villagers to ensure that the project intervention is prolonged as much as possible. In Burkina Faso it is my firm conviction that being dependent on somebody (especially somebody rich) is clearly preferable to being independent. When somebody notices that "you have to live up to your responsibilities as chief", it not only means that you have to give precise orders, it also means that you have to take care of a lot of problems of your subordinates (Fiske 1992). Independence, on the other hand, resembles expulsion.

- Farmers seek to avoid *self-reliance*. Self reliance is an important notion within development discourse, but it is clearly a strictly normative and ideological term. Trying to benefit as much as possible from a development project seems a natural way to position oneself vis-à-vis donors. Being self-reliant within a village logic means being left alone.

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"Taking their future in their own hands", a common term within NGO-rhetoric, remains a very unattractive option for the villager.

- Farmers stress *security*. Adventuring into new agricultural techniques and technologies can be a matter of whether you and your family are going to eat or not next year. A technique thus has to show not only that it increases production. It has to show that the extra labour put into e.g. the production of *diguettes* is not better invested elsewhere. And it has to show that it does not render the production system more vulnerable towards climatic irregularities and other calamities.

- Farmers dread *sustainability*. In his interesting book about *diguettes* in the Yatenga province, *"Behind the lines of Stone"*, Atampugre (1993, op.cit) describes how the OXFAM-funded *Projet Agro-Forestier* introduced *diguettes*. In a final discussion of the successes and shortcomings of the project, Atampugre is especially worried about the lack of overall environmental importance of the project, he sees no foundation laid for change, he is concerned about ensuring sustainability (ibid. 134). A farmer comforts him: *"It is like when you teach a child to walk. You stretch out your hand to enable it to take its first steps. If you leave it at this moment, it will fall back to its sitting position. You have to guide it a bit before you leave it. We are the children of PAF. PAF is teaching us to walk, but we cannot yet walk on our own. It will come but we don't know when* (ibid, p.135). What worries Atampugre though is that he cannot see when this will be. When will the farmers be independent? It seems to me he fails to recognize that self-reliance, sustainability and independence were never the objectives of the farmers, and what the farmer tries to do with his child/parent metaphor is trying to assure the continuity of their patron/client relationship.

Donors and beneficiaries alike, however, share the objective of promoting *development*. For certain farmers, especially the younger, *diguettes* might be visible signs that the village adheres to development. By adhering to this type of discourse, the villagers show their willingness to work on the donors' terms. As noted elsewhere, it is not uncommon for rural inhabitants in their interaction with development workers to confirm outsiders' preconceived ideas, given the power relations in such interfaces (Leach & Mearns 1996: 28) Following this line of thought, it seems relevant to see the adoption of *diguettes* in connection with intra village conflicts between older generations and younger, or between different clans fighting for power within the village.

Donors equally strive for development. But this is for very different reasons, which are often rather vaguely enunciated, and pursued in a quite ambiguous manner. But for donors, development remains a very normative version of a special conflict-rinsed modernity, which seems to be hard for the farmers to equate with the realities they are facing.

4.10 Concluding remarks about *diguette* construction

It has not been the intention of this section to reject the relevance of soil- and water conservation in Burkina Faso, neither to refute any effectiveness of these as they are practised. The aim of the *diguette* case has been to question the positivist basis onto which the *diguettes* have been advocated, by moving the emphasis to an analysis stressing the complexity of donor/recipient relations of power. First of all this implies a constant and critical reconsideration of the

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normative notions on which development orthodoxies are built. In this light, self-reliance means being left marginalized, and sustainability means you, literally, get stones for bread. On the other hand, dependency becomes an opportunity which needs to be nurtured through careful lip-service to development projects, where knowledge of development discourse is an important element.

Secondly, when implementing and evaluating projects like the DANIDA-projects in Boulgou and Seno, one probably has to be much more aware of not taking the statements of the respondents, farmers and aid workers alike, too much at face value. Rather, one ought to adapt a *verstehende* approach by which I mean that one should try to understand whether one would have done the same thing in his/her situation, in addition to analysing what kind of interests are at stake. The interviewer is always a potential partner, able to help the farmer out of his/her very marginalized position.

This is, howeve,r not what the DANIDA-project in Dori intends to do, although farmers, when questioned more thoroughly, were so critical to the continued construction of *diguettes*. In a recent evaluation (PNUD 1996), the evaluation team admits that the overall ecological impact of the project is negligible. Their solution to this is however not to change course but to increase the construction of *diguettes* five- to tenfold (PNUD 1996:2). The "fatigue" that many of the people attached to the project in the villages mentioned is cured by enlarging the scope of the project activities. The absence of measurable development is cured by adding more development activities.

4.11 Theoretical consequences

This chapter has tried to show that development intervention does not enter an institutional or political void, but a very lively and complex sphere of power and struggle over scarce resources. This dissertation initially suggested that the development project be seen as an arena of conflict and positioning over economic, political and symbolic resources. "Participation" in development activities may, in this perspective, be interpreted not only as compliance with project objectives, but also as strategic positionings to create linkages to external agents. Seen from this perspective, *diguettes* are to be seen as an element in the ongoing positionings and negotiation between the development project and the villagers.

It was, likewise, proposed that development discourse and narratives become influential in development policy-generating within natural resource management, actualized in specific programmes, projects and methodologies of data collection and analysis (Hoben 1996, 1998, Mearns & Leach 1996, Roe 1998, Speirs & Marcussen 1998). The construction of *diguettes* constitutes exactly such an example.

Furthermore, it was mentioned that certain theorists have questioned the notion of development, by analysing donor/recipient relations not merely as 'partnerships' or 'patron-client-relation-ships', but rather as a field within which symbolic frontiers are demarcated through the enunciation of narratives of development (Ferguson 1990, Laurent 1996). *Diguettes* may constitute such a symbol of people's perception of 'development', which one can adhere to by constructing them.

These theoretical entries seem to provide important elements for a more thorough understanding of *diguette* construction in Burkina Faso in particular, and to the analysis of development intervention in general. The problems in interpreting respondents' answers, in a context where many different agendas as to the usefulness of enhanced 'partnership' between external and village actors, prevail. It is my argument that the construction of *diguettes* is better understood in the context of an analysis of the difference between donor and recipient rationalities and objectives than merely as an agricultural technique to improve productivity and sustainability. I have attempted to highlight that these rationalities are at times conflicting, and tied to different discourses of development. The encounter of such different rationalities, the negotiations, unpackaging and differences in the logics of donors and beneficiaries, which are very common within rural development projects, constitute a complex social phenomenon which has not been given enough attention in the case of development intervention within natural resource management in Burkina Faso, and calls for a reassessments of the possibilities of building partnerships on the basis of activities like the *diguettes*.

But this discussion of development assistance through the interpretation of *diguette* construction has further theoretical dimensions to it. It is a part of a reflection where "research has moved largely away from the measurement of biophysical processes as a guide to degradation, and instead has increasingly undertaken the accessing of local adaptations to change and social movements. This reflects a more general transition in most social sciences from positivism - or the "scientific method": the inference of laws by testing hypotheses and theories - to a more post-modern or qualitative analysis which stresses the uniqueness of environmental perception and response". (Forsyth, 1998:108).

With these theoretical entry points we leave rural Burkina Faso, and take a last round of theoretical discussions before we attempt to say anything decisive about the impact of development aid.

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Chapter 5. Going through the notions

5.1 Introduction

In the initial theoretical Chapter 1 we ended on a somehow incomplete chord. Departing from a Giddensian interest in understanding relationships between structure and agency, avoiding on the one hand the determinism of structuralism and functionalism and on the other hand avoiding voluntarist explanations, I tried to end on what Gould calls a "constructivist" view, merging structure and agency and at the same time stressing notions like knowledgeability and power. In these attempts, Long and Olivier de Sardan were especially useful in providing entry points to the analysis of the social conflicts over aid, observing the different logics, systems of knowledge and specific rationalities at play among the different social actors involved in the development business. This involved, among other things, an analysis of a number of central notions onto which these social processes are built: notions like development, sustainability, and participation immediately come to ones mind. The different interpretations of these notions among the different actors are of central importance to the understanding of what goes wrong in development work. Each social actor has his/her own "project" within the project, which they pursue through appeals to reason, science, tradition, democracy, through coercion, persuasion, evasion or struggle (Blaikie, 1995).

As I mentioned in Chapter One, it was, however, primarily at the methodological level that this "actor-oriented approach" served as an adequate analytical instrument. The tracing of different farmers' logics, selection, deviation and *accaparement* has proved an effective instrument in the analysis of the donor-recipient interface. At the theoretical level, its commonsensical compromises merging the actor/structure dualism, its unwillingness to accept the implications of methodological individualism and its somehow unfinished treatment of relations of power and knowledge and its implications for how this influenced the way politics were constructed and pursued, required further elaboration and epistemological anchoring. It was, therefore, necessary to substantiate the argument with theoretical reflections upon how development discourse and narratives became instrumental in defining the agenda of the development projects and programmes under scrutiny. As I have tried to show, development programmes are based on narratives of causalities which appear flawed or at least grossly simplified, and this again is turned into policies that are based on notions, which are based on Western ideas of what would be desirable, rather than upon an analysis of conditions in the field. This has serious implications for the perception of different actors' knowledge about what is going on in the development process.

At this point, towards the end of the dissertation, it therefore seems necessary to review our venture to Burkina Faso through theoretical glasses. In the chapters above it is my hope that I have shown why things keep going wrong. The difficult point now is that I would like to avoid the "tool-perfecting" error, which reassures us that now that we have learned from our mistakes, we can prescribe more development in order to cure the illnesses within the development processes. A consequence of an untheoretical approach is that we may end up becoming "tool

perfecting" like the people that I have been criticising, in the sense that we become unable to provide a critique of the development efforts that is thorough enough. In this case, the risk is that we content ourselves with concluding that "we must be better at doing the job", assuring that next time it's going to be "real participation"; curing the lack of effect of development projects by prescribing more development as the medicine etc.

A second problem with an untheoretical approach is that we do not get beyond positivist and reductionist interpretations of man's interaction with the environment, leading to an insufficient understanding of the shortcomings and success stories of natural resource management ventures in Burkina Faso. We remain unable to answer to any reasonable degree what was the impact of the development activity. In the preceding chapters, I have tried to argue that a more precise and concrete answer to this question does not make much sense. In this sense Rondinelli is right: projects are fundamentally unpredictable, and a question of causality when analyzing social change emerges very quickly.

When looking at natural resource management and rural development in Burkina Faso it is tempting to question as Blaikie (1995) does, the "truth" of scientific interpretations of what is seen as a "crisis", and perhaps see these as contestable discourses about development and the environment, discourses that are very often formed as narratives with beginnings ends, and morals, reflecting an ethnocentric and teleological starting point. As he eloquently puts it in the title of his paper, are we talking of changing environments or changing views of them? (Blaikie, 1995).

This questioning of scientific methods is, of course, not unproblematic. The claim, for instance, that *diguettes* are ineffective is even more difficult to prove than proving that they were effective in the first place. The moment we start seriously questioning the representations of reality by what is known as "science", we open up for a dangerous relativism where any theory or belief is as good as the other, we reject any kind of accumulation of knowledge as possible, and we reject the idea that we know more now than we used to. Scientific methodologies have after all, as Peet notes (1999) contributed by insisting on evidence, contrary to mere beliefs. On the other hand, it might be noted with Latour (1999), that many scientific methods deliberately are temptations to produce order and patterns, "The most incomprehensible thing in the world would be for the pattern to remain incomprehensible after such rearrangements", as he notes, following the work of pedologists. We all, in one way or another, try to avoid what Huxley has called "The great tragedy of science - the slaying of a beautiful hypothesis by an ugly fact".

The *diguettes* constitute a beautiful example of how "order" can be produced, and the effectiveness of development aid can be proven. Have we not increased yields? Careful mention as to what fields were treated with dikes, and whether these fields were at the same time the ones that received the highest labour inputs to the detriment of other fields is, however, important to question. One may ask what kind of fields were not treated? Maybe the ones that were not very productive already? Did the treated fields, however, not receive an extra weeding by the farmers to honour the donors? Or an extra amount of manure? As Latour notes, the way we measure the effectiveness of *diguettes,* and thereby of development as such, constitutes a specific transformation of soil (or stones) into words, thereby leading us to a transformed constructed world of scientific data.

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And we should not forget that with *diguettes* we have a rather "easy" example of an *ex post* impact. As long as we stick to assessing the increase in field yields, we are within measureable spheres. But how do we proceed from here and state with any clarity that this construction of *diguettes* has led to an "improvement of the living conditions among the rural poor"? To the best of my knowledge, these questions remain impossible to answer.

5.2. A discursive look at "cross cutting issues"

Having tried in the analysis of development intervention to see how to merge poststructuralist views with actor-orientation, let's try to look at some of the notions, that I have been criticising as being central to the misunderstandings of the deficiencies of development aid in Burkina Faso. In the following I shall elaborate upon three of these, Sustainability, participation and dependency (and its antonym self reliance). The reason I treat these three is that they have special relevance to the analytical framework I have tried to establish, as they are cornerstones in the normative point of departure for Westerns donors' views of and aspirations for development. Furthermore, they are interrelated, i.e. there can be no sustainability without participation, no independence without sustainability and no participation without etc. As noted in Chapter 2, these are the cornerstones of development in the nineties, whereas I argue that earlier developmental problems were ascribed to geophysical and geopolitical features, a point which is nowadays downplayed to an astonishing degree..

5.2.1 Sustainability

A central, current concern of development assistance as a whole, is the sustainability of the development projects. The meanings of sustainability and sustainable development as "cross cutting issues" are, as Peet and Watts note, "hotly contested, but the new lexicon is so endemic it appears with as much frequency in the frothy promotional literature of the World Bank as in the rhetoric of the Sierra Club, the US military or the myriads of Third World grassroots environmental and community movements"(Peet & Watts, 1996, p.1).

Wolfgang Sachs (1999), in his polemic denigration of the discourse on sustainability, traces the proliferation of the notion's status as a worldwide panacea back to 1987. From this moment sustainable development was launched in the Brundtland Report as the way to square the circle: bridging the gap between the two grand world-political opposites, ecological sustainability and international justice, sustainability being a word every interest group, nation or alliance could reach some sort of agreement about. Along with democracy, education and participation (and certain contenders and upcomers), sustainability is on every page within development projects and programme reports. All activities should be sustainable in one way or another. And any activity can be criticised for not being it.

On a world political level, sustainability meets the Northern donors' pledge to right of nature and its resources, and the South's pledge to global equality, according to Sachs. It is, however, a concept that is designed to maximize consensus rather than clarity. Sustainable development is "development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland Report, quoted in Sachs, 1999). It thus merges an interest in economic growth and capitalist expansion with preservation of the pandas. It

proposes a way to merge the North's interest in its continued right to pillage resources worldwide, and the South's pledge for global social equity.

In the Burkinan project documents it is not more precisely defined what is meant in concrete terms by the notion, it seems implicitly assumed that the reader is aware what is meant. *"Développement local durable"* is to take the forme of *"un appui souple à l'autopromotion"* (Danida, 1997) This vague statement, which is rather tautological, does not give us much idea of what is meant by the concept, but sustainability apparently has to do with attempts to transfer decision making from the project to the beneficiaries. The World Bank has an even more tautological definition of sustainable development: "Sustainable development is development that lasts" (Quoted in Sachs, 1999, p. 81). It seems, however, that sustainability in the eyes of Danida includes following elements:

- an *ecological* sustainability, stressing that natural resource management activities supported by projects should enhance natural resource management practices that are not causing a degradation of the environment, and which help to reestablish an ecological equilibrium;

- an *institutional* sustainability, stressing that support should be backed by a capacity-building component, assuring that institutions are created which enable the continuation of project activities beyond a project intervention phase;

- a *financial* sustainability, aiming at scaling activities to a level where they do not become economically prohibitive the moment they are not supported heavily by external sources.

This report is not the place for a more thorough discussion of the genealogy of this omnipresent status of sustainability as a central cross-cutting issue within development practice and studies. The concept has been severely criticized by writers with very different objectives and backgrounds (see e.g. Escobar 1995, 1996; Mearns and Leach 1996). Most often, it is accepted as a general objective which all development activities strive for, an attempt to design environmentally sustainable development interventions, assuring that the development activity does not undermine or overexploit the natural resources that the development is based upon; institutionally sustainable, assuring the creation of the necessary local capacity to run activities after an externally-supported phase; and economically sustainable, so that it does not fall apart the day after the project has left leaving local institutions with prohibitive running costs.

As mentioned above, *environmental* sustainability is a problematic concept, as this is to be seen within a narrative purporting that a sort of equilibrium has been distorted, which should be restored, a "paradise lost" narrative as it has been called (Hoben 1998; Marcussen, 1999). It eventually tends to lead to policies operating with notions like "carrying capacities", which are extremely difficult to operationalise in accordance with the aspirations of rural populations. This narrative is, however, extremely strong and is an underlying principle in virtually all environment programmes and projects in Burkina Faso. Even though "carrying capacities" are constantly surpassed and people still survive, this narrative lives on despite all empirical attempts to refute it.

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The environmental sustainability concept also opens up another interesting avenue. Sachs (1999) notes that the shift from the sustainability of nature (which meant that a degree of conservation became necessary) to the sustainability of development meant a theoretical shift. Looking at nature as a resource, it became something which could be value-assessed, where quotas of carbondioxide, biodiversity and whatever could be exchanged. As Sachs rightly notices, this might, however, lead to "a lesson more in the sustainability of money than of the environment."

Following the Rio conference in 92, environmental sustainability has become a central objective for virtually every rural development project in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the Burkina Faso case we see a rather simplistic approach to this problem, where environmental sustainability is equated with the protection of the forest, the planting of trees and the production of *diguettes*. It has so far not been possible to measure any impact of this activity (PNUD 1996), partly because it is unclear what the indicators for an improvement in the environment consist of.

A related problem which we have already touched upon is that of *institutional and economic* sustainability in Burkina Faso. This ends up being synonymous with economically balanced accounts where expenses and incomes are equal. Sustainability becomes "able to run according to market forces". Market forces are, however, a relative notion if anything. To run public institutions according to market forces, as structural adjustment programmes attemt in the name of institutional and economic sustainability, is however unrealistic. This is not the way public institutions are run anywhere else in the world. This demand for sustainability completely ignores the political implications involved in downscaling and expanding service institutions, a surprising fact given the severe political struggles such social processes trigger off in European countries. Sustainability thus becomes the ultimate "tool-perfecting" notion, able to recast whatever political problem as a technical one.

What we can see is that the donor's quest for sustainability in many ways seriously conflicts with the interests of the different actors involved. In the name of sustainability, subsidies on agricultural inputs, credits and animal health have been reduced. In the name of sustainability, the villagers now have to mobilize substantial contributions when logistical support in the villages is provided. Altogether features that in the eyes of those involved resemble budget cuts, and which do not point towards longer-term commitment on the part of either donors or beneficiaries. This is linked to the logics of *"assistencialism"* as mentioned in Chapter Two, there is no reason why the beneficiary groups should try to send home the hand that feeds them because of some moral conviction that long-term "sustainability" is important, especially if the development activity has been introduced from the outside and will have problems going on without continued support as promised.

A differing conception of sustainability among the "target groups" is, however, very central to the understanding of the villagers' strategies *vis-à-vis* external agents like development projects. Sustainability among the farmers means stressing security against crop failures and guarantees for long-term commitments from providers and buyers of input and produce. This means that if a project wants to introduce "improved" agricultural techniques, it has to guarantee a long-term commitment, not all of a sudden pulling out because of second thoughts as to the sustainability of the new crop, new technique or whatever - technologies, that farmers have often been persuaded to invest considerable resources in. External agents have failed considerably in this respect.

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It is exactly this conflicting understanding of the meaning of sustainability which is at the heart of the problems between donors and beneficiaries. The projects, whose understanding of sustainability is that anything which cannot run according to free market forces is unsustainable, demands that the villagers understand that subsidies and handouts will not be able to go on. The farmers, on the other hand, see this as yet another abandonment by the external agents, a further sign of lack of long-term commitment. This leads to frustration as the premises upon which the activities were started change drastically, necessary inputs become prohibitively expensive and eventually the activity is abandoned.

The problem is more serious when cash crops are involved where huge increases in input prices are often introduced in the name of sustainability, and farmers are left with seriously diminished incomes, but with no immediate alternative but to gradually shift back to food crop production (See Kaare & Nielsen 1999).

Post-modernist critiques of grand development theories as meta-narratives have attributed the failure of development theory to a modernity discourse with untenable metaphysical starting points (Schuurman 1993). Much of this critique has been helpful in the sense that the focus has been redirected to less normative notions, analysing the dynamics of social processes in e.g. Africa from an interest in uncovering the dynamics rather than the deficiencies of societies (Berry 1993, Bayart 1989). The interest in sustainability is a serious drawback in this respect, in the sense that it is a completely metaphysical, normative and nebulous concept without any theoretical foundation. The notion of sustainability is, therefore, often best dropped entirely, as it is a source of confusion rather than clarification when a concise statement of development objectives is to be made. Another less radical solution is to narrow the definition down to mean something specific in the given context, so that the concept is not interpreted differently by the actors involved. As things are now, it is clearly a notion embedded in normative Western assumptions, dangerously detached from the realities of rural Burkina Faso, making us address the wrong issues and raising the wrong questions.

5.2.2 Participation

No other word within development discourse has achieved such popularity as participation. Hardly anybody within the entire development apparatus is against participation: World Bank bosses, NGOs, government officials, everybody adheres to the principle of popular participation. Mitchener (1998) attempts to round up the debate on participation, exemplifying with cases from Burkina Faso in a recent edition of the acclaimed "World Development". She constructs a typology of different forms of participation differentiating between "planner-centered" and "people-centered". The planner-centered participation focuses on administrative and financial efficiency, its goal being "to provide the masses with a broader understanding of the national development effort" (Vengroff, cited in Mitchener 1998). People-centered participation, on the other hand, holds that participation is both a means and an end in itself, a means to redistribute scarce resources meeting "felt" needs, but equally a process which "empowers the poor by enhancing local management capacity, increasing confidence in indigenous potential and raising collective consciousness" (Mitchener, 1998: 2106). She furthermore suggests that participation can be subdivided according to other typologies as well: "Genuine participation" based on empowerment and cooperation aiming at citizen control, delegated power and partnership and on

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the other hand "pseudo-participation", based on *assistencialism* and domestication leading to placation, consultation, informing and manipulation.

According to another classification system, Mitchener quotes White describing four types of participation: nominal, instrumental, representative and transformative. White stresses that stakeholders do not share the same expectations of participation. Planners have top-down interests whereas beneficiaries have bottom-up interests. At the nominal, instrumental and representative levels the different stakeholders employ concurrently conflicting definitions of participation. Only at the transformative level are both groups interested in the empowerment of the beneficiaries.

Finally, Mitchener mentions Cohen and Uphoff, who have a more applied focus. They do not only define types of participation, but also *who* participates and *how*. The *types* of participation refer to the different project cycles: participation in decision-making, implementation, in benefits and evaluation. The definition of *who* participated is based on different groups of actors: local residents, local leaders, government personnel and foreigners. Finally the *how*-question is based on the form, extent and effect of participation when it takes place.

It is on the basis of these typologies that Mitchener ventures to the field in Burkina Faso to look at the level of participation among different stakeholders within a community school project. She finds out, however, that problems at field level indicate theoretical weaknesses in the concept of participation. She particularly notes that among project staff, participation refers to the responsibilities of the beneficiaries in making the project successful. Participation is a duty, a "local contribution", you do not get something for nothing. She furthermore highlights the difficulties of drawing a line between the "felt" needs of a community and needs defined by outsiders, an issue that challenges the participation rhetoric seriously. She indicates that beneficiaries do not act on the basis of ideological rhetoric, but on the basis of past experiences, including an impression of participation as meaning physical and financial payment for development assistance.

She therefore concludes that notions of power should be taken more seriously into account. Project personnel see participation as beneficiary contributions, and are not ready to relinquish control to beneficiaries, as they seek to avoid "working themselves out of their jobs". Beneficiaries, on the other hand, see participation not as a means to obtain "self-reliance, empowerment, but as an opportunity to extract resources from willing agencies." (Mitchener, 1998) We are thus often still far from "genuine people-centered participation", as the level of participation invested by the different stakeholders is determined by how each group gains maximum benefit given the power struggles going on.

5.2.2.1 Discussion

Mitchener has a lot of important observations from the field, which do indeed challenge the existing rhetoric of participation. She does not, however, get to a more profound critique of the notion, partly because she refrains from a theoretical critique of the typologies that she initially lines up. Her analysis therefore becomes a bit shallow despite the fuel she delivers for a more thorough critique of the notion of participation. My critique is focused on the following points:

- She does not adapt a sufficiently critical hermeneutic approach to her data;

- She accepts the arbitrarily and normatively-defined categories that are the basis of the typologies that she lines up in the beginning;

- Her stakeholder groups are reductionistically defined social groups that are seen as bearers of certain preconceived interests;

- her planner/people-centred participation typology is at least as simplistic as the other typologies that she questions;

- Her critique of participation is somewhat disengaged from a more thorough critique of the notion of development as it is practised.

This results in an overall conclusion which is as sad as it is true: "Development planners and academics are at a point where they must adjust participatory frameworks to be more responsive to field-level realities (Mitchener, 1998: 2116). We have to improve in our work, "tool perfecting" once again, next time it is going to be "real" participation.

The typologies that Mitchener lists are based on the normative and ideological assumptions of their writers more than on anything else. Making a typology of "genuine participation" vs. "pseudo-participation", the first question one should ask is who defines what is genuine and what is pseudo? The typology seems to stem from a belief that African society, somewhere beneath colonialism, modernity and development, has a communitarian core where people have common interests and act together as a community. This belief does not only exist among the donors, but is central in many Burkinan farmers' associations' views of themselves. An extremely rose-coloured picture of Burkinan "traditional" society can be found in the declarations of the Ouahigouya-based Six-S organisations, based on the thoughts of their founder, Mr. Bernard Lédéa Ouédraogo. This local NGO has an extremely romantic vision of "traditional" Burkinan society as based on trust, mutual care, respect, cooperation, the absence of competition, helping each other out of problems etc. (Ouédraogo, 1990). This romantic vision of the past is shared with the majority of the cultures of the world, who all lament how "*sic transit gloria mundi*", but do not specify in detail how this process of moral decay goes on as anything other than reinterpretations of a lost past. In this sense, participation fits well into a development discourse where development issues are depoliticized and "target groups" are made into homogenous categories ready for social engineering. The communitarian past, like the ecological equilibrium, must be revived through participatory sustainable development.

"Genuine" participation is part of the same discourse as the idea that there is a dichotomy to be made between a felt need and an externally-defined need, that a dichotomy exists between donor-driven and demand-driven development aid. As Mitchener rightly notes, these distinctions are difficult to work with as "When asked what they need they will feed back what they have been taught to need"(Dichter, 1989 in Mitchener 1998). Not only that, they will also have acquired knowledge about what is realistic to obtain, and might, as I tried to show in Chapter 4, even venture into activities that they consider are in vain in the hope that this might open up for other activities. Pseudo-participation based on *assistencialism* therefore seems every bit as genuine, quite a bit more understandable and probably also a better option for beneficiary groups, as Olivier de Sardan told us in Chapter 2. Performing strange rituals like planting trees, creating groups, and participating in projects resembles Melanesian Cargo cults (Laurent 1996, Laurent

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&Mathieu, 1994, Langley 1983), but as one author has noted, contrary to the Melanesian cargo cults, they work! (Christoplos, 1994).[17]

The second typology Mitchener mentions is equally problematic. The range from nominal to transformative participation with all its levels of interests is, upon closer scrutiny, also reductionist in its *a priori* taking for granted of certain stakeholders' interests. In stating that planners should have an interest in a "top-down"-approach and beneficiaries in a "bottom-up" approach, one has already revealed a heavy ideological bias. I assume that in the implicit topography of power incumbent in the top-down/bottom-up dichotomy, beneficiary groups are to be placed at the bottom, and project staff and donors at the top. With my experience from the field I would say that things are rather the other way around. Beneficiary groups search for clientelist relations with donors, based on acquired dependency in order to maintain support from the outside (top-down). The donors, on the contrary, attempt go "bottom up", in order to be able to leave the terrain as soon as possible in the name of sustainability, often having far too much faith in local institutions created or heavily reinforced with the objective of providing the framework for the project intervention.

Another thing is that a disaggregation of "beneficiary groups" and "planners" would have been a good idea, as these appear much more homogenous than they have been found in the Burkina Faso context.

Finally, Cohen and Uphoff's definition is completely untheoretical and takes the form of a sort of checklist which, to the best of my knowledge, does not reveal much about the appreciation of the development activity among different stakeholder groups. In their attempts to point out who participates and how, they might as well have exchanged the word participation with "hat": they have a completely instrumental and undynamic interpretation of the concept as if it were any old technical device you could add to your project package.

Mitchener states that these typologies are insufficient and that her findings in Burkina Faso challenge these analytical entries. However her own typology, planner-centered vs. people-centered participation does not clarify matters. Again, she is attributes special interests and behaviours to these two categories of actor, not on the basis of any empirical verification, but on the basis of normative, preconceived notions.

In all of the different typologies, participation is viewed as a distinct, project-related phenomenon, an instrument applicable in order to improve project performance. The development project is seen as a distinct, isolated social category with an easily definable set of actors - two groups, the implementors and the beneficiaries. On top of this simplification is another problem within the discourse of participation. "Lots" of participation means good administrative management, "getting the institution right", but this is a focus which ignores the more political aspects of the development activity or project, which I have tried to argue are so important.

If we return for a moment to the power typologies of Nelson & Wright, (1995) as mentioned in Chapter 1, it is clear that the discourse of popular participation is based almost entirely on the

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[17]   Christoplos however does not provide any convincing evidence as to why the Melanesian cargo cults should not work.

"power *to* - metaphor. As they mentioned there is a danger in ending up with rather voluntaristic conclusions, which has proved to be a valid concern.

I would argue that to speak of participatory projects versus non-participatory projects is in a sense missing the point. As the Dori experience tells us, *people always participateas far as possible in development projects,* they always try to get the most out of them in ways as they were described in Chapter two, by adopting different strategic positionings. When they do not participate, it is on the basis of a rational judgement on the part of the "beneficiary" actor that he/she will either not get anything out of it; he/she has been excluded by other "beneficiaries" that have been more skilful in making alliances with the project; or he/she knows that he/she will have his/her head chopped off if involved in project activities, the project being oblivious as to the political implications of the development activity. In that sense I am in line with Ferguson, when asked what should be done - they are doing it already. But it is the analysis of how they are doing it that I have found interesting, and this demands an approach based on critical hermeneutics and methodological individualism.

5.2.3. Dependence

Where most analysts are aware of the problems of operating with the very normative and opague notions of participation and sustainability, people are less careful with dependence. The importance of establishing relations of self reliance, ridding people of the dependence *vis-à-vis* especially donors is a central concern among not only the donors, as stated in the project documents of the Danida projects in Burkina Faso, but also among researchers. It was, thus, not only Danida, that stressed the need to support beneficiary groups so that they could be self-reliant (1997). Maclure lamented that new structures of dependence were being created between donors and target groups because of development intervention; Atampugre was concerned about whether the local NGOs taking over projects from the big international NGOs would ever be able to "stand on their own feet", or would continue to be dependent upon their foreign partners. As shown in Chapter 3 all critics of aid except Piveteau were in one way or another concerned that with continued dependence on external support, the genuineness of the created institutions that are supposed to undertake the tasks of development is put into question. Dependence is equated with "dependent upon external economic support", which for some ideological reason is seen as unfortunate. Inspired by the actor-oriented sociologists and anthropologists (Crehan & von Oppen 1988, Olivier de Sardan 1988, 1995), this study has shown that dependence is not looked upon in negative terms by the beneficiary groups. The creation of linkages with external sources of resources is a vital strategy, and these relations are nurtured in ways that merit serious attention, instead of lamenting that "patron-client relationships" are established, that will not be able to continue after an externally funded phase. Lamenting the continuation of dependence-relations therefore risks missing the point. The social changes arising from the pluralisation of Burkina Faso society and the introduction of more players such as NGOs are creating an entire industry of dependency-building, social processes involving brokerage and challenges to state hegemony, which are important research issues that deserve better than being condescendingly reduced to being forms of dependence.

The idiosyncratic view of dependence is probably based on old Western ideologies of the blessings of being the independent, individual citizen of the *Gesellschafft,* free to do whatever he (rarely she) feels, sparked by *zweckrationalität* and individualism. Without resorting to

essentialist explanations of African societies being the opposite, i.e. based on communality, reciprocity, *Gemeinschafft* etc., it seems fair to emphasize that dependence in a Burkina Faso context stresses the second meaning of the word as it is listed in the Oxford Dictionary, i.e. dependence not as "being supported by other, but equally as a relation of confident trust."

The condescending view upon dependence has been easy to couple with an ideology of independence, of freeing the African continent of the burden of exploitation and colonialism etc. This has led to the strong ideological reservation against dependence despite the fact that establishing these relations is a central concern to the rural Burkinan social actor. S/he of course prefers dependence to the least viable of options, namely independence which is the same as being left alone, abandoned in the middle of nowhere. It is therefore necessary that development workers, researchers and others be much more careful when they promote "*auto-promotion*", "taking the future in your own hands," "help to self-help", "self reliance", "autonomous associations", "genuine grass-roots", all measures to prevent dependence. The beneficiaries may not be interested.

Burkinans have been questioning me on the issue asking: "when you make a project, you bring in huge amounts of logistics, build houses, employ people, etc, so why do the donors want to leave often even before things got going?" It is obvious that the people involved in the project see this as cutting off the branch that they are sitting on. But more than that, the culturally embedded logic of wanting all institutions to be able to self-reliant, to be able to continue independently and sustainably, is not always met with much comprehension.

The ideological pretensions of dependence/independence lead to development policies that may be rather ill conceived, and out of touch with contemporary realities. In this contemporary world, that some call globalized, it is certain that whether we accept globalization or not, nations like Burkina Faso have ever more dwindling possibilities of defining and implementing an "independent" national development policy. When Danida (1997) speaks of supporting Burkina Faso in achieving "self-sufficiency" with given commodities, it is a question whether this is not once again an example of ill-conceived ideas of development policies. "Self-sufficiency" was never the objective for the donor countries. And self-sufficiency is no guarantee that poverty and starvation will be eradicated. It is unlikely that "self-sufficiency" within for instance millet productionwill address problems of famine and malnutrition, as these are not caused by national scarcities, but by social modes of distribution and households' inability to cope with times of crisis.

Much of the concern about creating systems of dependence in my view therefore deserves a reassessment. The creation of relationships of dependence does not seem to be among the more alarming consequences of aid, and it is clearly not a consequence which is unpopular among the beneficiaries.

5.3. Summing up

As I have attempted to show, the efforts to construct sustainable, participatory poverty oriented development in order to enable Burkina Faso's rural population to stand on their own feet are facing severe problems. Their impact has been minimal, in fact we do not even really know how to assess whether there has been one.

It is tempting at this point to state that in order for the development in Burkina Faso to be sustainable, the notions of sustainability, participation and dependency/self reliance should be abandoned. But it somehow does not sound right.

By focusing on these issues we end up addressing the wrong questions, providing the wrong solutions. Instead I would recommend, as I have attempted to do, a careful deconstruction of these "cross-cutting" notions of which development discourse riddled with. This should be attempted from both a post-structuralist discourse-oriented point of view, and from an actor-oriented approach, thereby exploring how the development discourse shapes the way interventions are conceived and imagined, and at the same time highlighting how different interpretations of these concepts lead to conflict and confusion over their meaning.

Although there are problems of incommensurability between these two different lines of thought, especially regarding the notions of agency and power, these problems are not insurmountable. The benefits, however, are an avoidance of normative and teleological assumptions about development plus the possibility of discarding a positivist interpretation of impact without ending up in postmodern relativism where one type of knowledge is as good as the other. The avoidance of using flawed notions like sustainability, participation and dependence could serve as a first step in this direction.

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Chapter 6. Conclusion
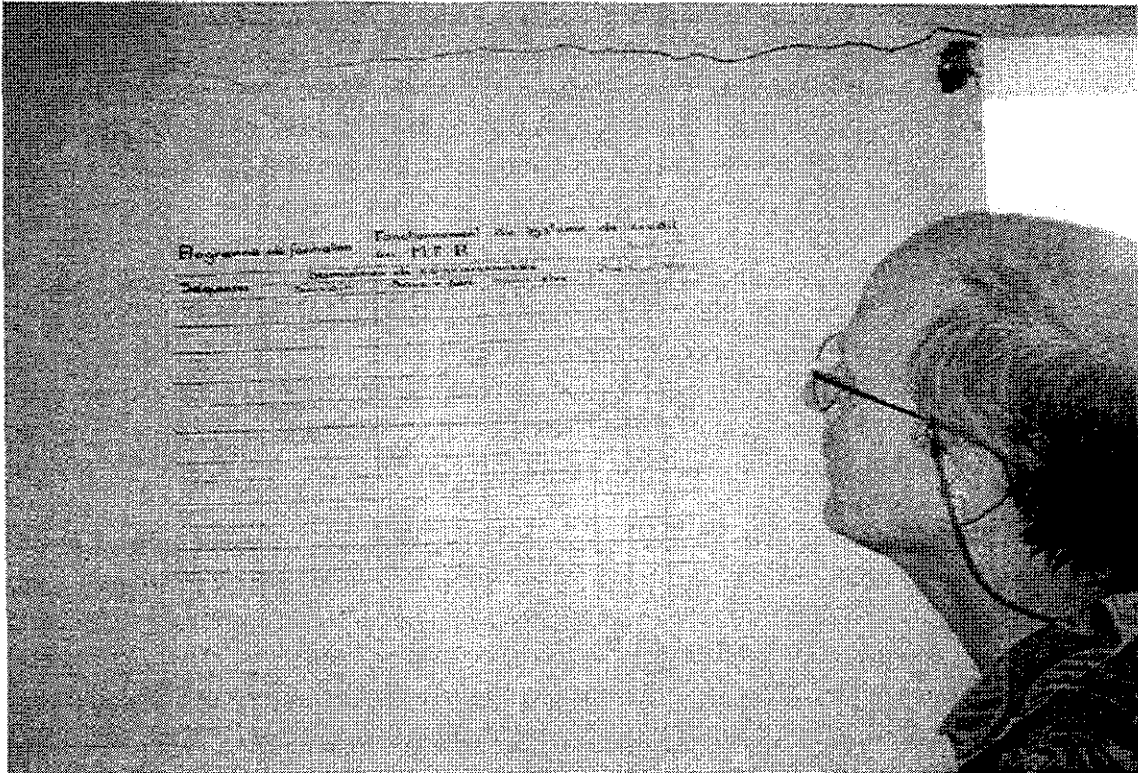
A strangely revelatory photo. The donor inspects a transformation of reality he is able to interpret: The West African NGO (this case is from Senegal, but we saw the same behaviour among Pag la Yiri and CRUS) has performed the demanded ritual and has produced a plan on how credits will be distributed and knowledge transferred. Targets are set, objectives identified and responsibilities delegated. Next year, the donor will be able to assess whether targets have been met and anticipated activities have been executed. The development project seems to be on the right track, the NGO can expect funding to be continued, the donor can note that capacity has been built.

Certain dangers however seem to be lurking. Cracks in the walls of the project building are indicate that sustainability might be in peril. Other dangers are also present. How does our donor assess whether his activity has had an impact, has made a difference outside the project office with its well-paid staff? The *Logical Framework* schemes on the wall might not lead to the same interpretation of the reality of the project as the one the beneficiaries have arrived at. And the staff will probably be reluctant to put forward criticism of their own activities, fearing that this might lead to a discontinuation of their jobs.

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The donor will have to go to the field to measure the impact. But as we saw, even an apparently straightforward and clearly visible thing as a *diguette* appeared extremely difficult to assess more precisely. How do we assess the impact of a programme like the *Gestion de Terroirs* in Burkina Faso? Has the project contributed to an improvement in the living conditions of the population, or to a more sustainable use of natural resources, as was the stated objective? Armed with PRA, ECRIS-methodologies, Entitlement approaches, actor orientation, critical hermeneutics and *verstehen,* the researcher ventures to the villages to see whether the efforts have been worthwhile or not. Soon, doubts arise as to whether this is the right way of looking at things. Defining entitlements, strategic groups, revealing conflicts and interests, scrutinizing the derived effects of the presence of the development apparatus, analysing the political contexts, emphasizing historicity; this is all very well but does it enable us to answer the question of what the impact has been?

I think it is the only way to get around the problem. We have to moderate our expectations. We have to accept that a crude measurement of the impact is an impossible venture, sparked by very simplistic positivist assumptions about the measurability of social change, and an exaggerated belief in the possibility of establishing social causalities. Furthermore, we have to accept that whether someting is in a state of crisis, be it institutional, environmental or managerial, depends on the eyes that look at it more than anything else.

Impact studies in European societies have for a long time been considered more or less unrealistic the way they are now being promoted in Africa. Who would dream of assessing what the impact has been of, for instance, building a new hospital in Copenhagen? Ok, you might conclude that waiting lists have been reduced, but these are not the type of questions development donors ask. Has health improved? Has the quality of life improved among the beneficiaries? Has the impact been positive or negative? These questions have proved not only impossible to answer, but they are also an indication of the unrealistic assumptions underlying development thinking which make us ask the wrong questions, address the wrong issues, implement projects that fail to attract the enthusiasm of the beneficiary groups. In Africa, however, they prevail. The donor is in his right to know whether he is getting his money's worth. I think he has to lower his expectations, or perhaps look for different answers instead.

Are we, on the other hand, willing to accept a view purporting that it is more or less impossible to say anything about the impact of the efforts we make, unrealistic to predict anything, and in a sense even fruitless to say anything about a given social situation, as knowledge is socially constructed, and forms of local knowledge are ignored? I do not think so, but this does imply a deconstruction of notions like development and planned intervention in order to understand what the social processes set in motion actually mean to the social actors involved.

When assessing the impact of "capacity building", "animation", "institution building", "training" , a first and very pragmatic approach could be to go into the process itself and look at the way it is being carried out, to see whether it is in any way self-reflecting, whether there is any iterative dialogue with the beneficiaries, whether they have any influence on the way this type of programme is outlined, whether there is any participant assessment going on of the training. And especially what processes of selection have taken place in order to define who become the beneficiaries. Too much emphasis has been on the quantity, not the quality of the training, and as Maclure mentioned, and I also found in Dori, much of the *animation* is indeed of very low

standard: irrelevant, condescending, paternalistic and pedantic. By focusing on the process, we are in a sense "tool-perfecting" again, but this time it is in a manner, which shifts the emphasis away from the positivist attempt to measure the *ex post* impact, accepting that it is in the *animation* process itself that the benefits are to be seen, not in immediate changes in the behaviour of the target group, caused by the *animation*. This is not going to solve the problem of knowledge transfer, but it is an acceptance of the dynamism that Olivier de Sardan mentioned, the logics of selection within the project "package" are taken seriously, and the dissemination of the package becomes part of the stated objective.

When looking at projects in Burkina Faso the view of development as discourse has been a useful instrument, narrowing down the ideological and normative notions on which development is built, showing that these rest on certain narratives and teleological ideas of social evolution, which do not correspond with realities in Burkina Faso. Analytical attention is, furthermore, turned to the webs of power underlying the practices of the different actors in the development process. The way conflicts over meaning are fought out is crystallized in its most pure form within the institution that epitomizes development intervention: the development project. The focus is, thus, first on what sets the agenda rather than on how to improve management as the project inserts itself into society. Secondly, it is to disseminate the unpackaging and selection of the project elements by the different social actors, and to analyse the conflicts and social positions it entails.

The agenda of development as it is conceived by the Danish Development Cooperation is, as I have attempted to show, built on a preconceived idea of crisis in Burkina Faso, a crisis because society has gone from a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium. In an urge to establish sustainability (a notion which is never more precisely defined as anything but a tautology), activities are outlined, which are in fact in sharp contrast to the strategies that the populations of rural Burkina Faso themselves pursue. Never have I heard of a development project helping people to get to Cote d'Ivoire in order to find meaningful work (I am not however stating that this would be desirable), or a project helping people to get involved in gold panning. These popular survival strategies are looked upon with condescenscion by donors, who seem to think that *"la fixation des jeunes"* in the villages is a vital element in the success of their efforts to regain equilibrium, and the fact that the young do everything to flee away to what they see as solutions does not make any significant impression.

It would, however, be a serious error to state that development projects have not had a tremendous influence upon the socio-economy of Seno. In the town of Dori, 3 cars out of a guesstimated approximately 100 are not financed by development aid money. I mentioned earlier the roughly 400 jobs within natural resource management in Seno. These people invest primarily in livestock, which is likely to have a larger impact on pastures in the region than all their *Gestion de Terroirs* attempts. Roads have been built, and recently electricity has come to Dori. A very popular pastime is watching Champions League football on Wednesdays via satellite in a huge hangar in the middle of town, a thing that attracts considerable crowds. People pay CFA 100 per match. For young people, these are things that make Dori look very much more interesting than village life. On the other hand they may also contribute to making Dori more of an option compared to the tough city life of Ouagadougou and Abidjan.

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Development, to the people of Seno, (and especially the young) perhaps rather constitutes a sphere you can flee to when escaping from the boredom and tightly woven webs of social control in the villages. Development means electricity, high paid jobs, per diems and flashy 4X4s, and provides escape from gerontocracy, witchcraft, pounding millet and weeding the fields. No matter what the character of the development aid, whether it is participatory, top-down, bilateral, non-governmental, poverty-oriented or whatever.

The attraction of development upsets social order. Nowadays it is not impossible to see a *ferroBe* take a job as watchman at a development worker's house or at a project, a task he would never have lowered himself to do in the past. Unintentionally, development institutions thereby become instigators of significant social transformation. New elites slowly emerge. The lack of resources of the state, the pluralisation of the institutional landscape to which aid is directed and the transformations within "traditional" power structures represent a political arena where the *accaparement* of development resources constitutes a major source of power and resources. The topography of this landscape is, however, changing constantly, and the social actors may wear several hats, according to the occasion. Fixed categories as to what is state and what is society, what is traditional and what is modern, what is local and what is external, are inadequate and become the roots of simplification.

The mayor in Dori lamented that the German project "did nothing to help Dori, but only hired people from Burkina Faso". This in a sense confirms Ferguson's thesis, that development becomes an instrument of new forms of governance, not as a willed action by a state with powerful agency, but as a kind of knotting and congealing of power, in this case state power. This is no linear, evolutionary process leading to a specific type of modernity. Bayart (1996) makes an interesting distinction between what he sees as the state *construction* i.e. a deliberate creation of an apparatus of political control; and a state *formation* (in French) a more conflictual, involuntary and largely unconscious process, conducted in a disorderly fashion of clashes and compromises by more or less anonymous actors. It is the latter case which is interesting in this case. Development constitutes an important element in this *formation,* with its ambiguous clashes of logics and differences in pace, at times supporting a *désétatisation,* sometimes an *étatisation,* mobilizing different groups of social actors who all have their goals to pursue.

This brings us back to the problem of impact. Development is *the* most important societal influence in what is defining current Burkinan modernity, development is becoming the dominant discourse in the formation of a type of governmentality as Bayart (1989), inspired by Foucault, calls *"la politique du ventre"*, an unfortunate expression that, though sophisticatedly outlined, invites for simplistic and essentialist interpretations. The formation of this governmentality is a bumpy political trajectory, where the diachronic construction of the meaning of development among the many social actors is by no way linear or predictable. "What holds a society together is the cohesion of its world of meanings", says Bayart (1989, p. 329, my translation), quoting Castoriadis. Clearly, development is the grand motor in this societal construction of meaning, but this is definitely an extremely uneven and heterogenous process, where our methodological individualism has taught us to be cautious in outlining deterministic and teleological patterns of social transformation. The interpretation of development and its accompanying notions needs deconstruction and reinstallment within the specific context where development is on the agenda.

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In an impact study of a Danida-financed NGO-project I carried out in collaboration with a Tanzanian colleague in Tanzania (Kaare & Nielsen 1999), our team leader asked us during a field visit towards the end of our study whether the impact of the project we were analysing had been "overall positive or overall negative." After looking at each other, hoping the other would answer, we had to admit that the question was impossible to answer. Today, if he asked me again I would probably have responded more harshly, that the question itself is a testimony of a too simplistic view of what we are aiming at when we venture into doing development. It is not my intention to argue that, for instance, the Danida projects (or "agricultural sector programme components" or whatever they prefer to call them) in Burkina Faso have been failures, neither is it my intention to come forward with recommendations as to how to improve them. We have to be careful not to take political issues, remove them from the realm of political discourse, only to recast them in a neutral language of development, suggesting new techniques of management. What I would, however, recommend is that the project donor and manager accept the political implications of the development activity, and then hold onto the horse he wants to support, accepting the forces he is up against. To simply ignore them like the German CTA, stating that "he will have nothing to do with the mayor, because what he does has nothing to do with development" is as far as I can see a lost battle.

This step towards a development assistance that is willing to take part in political struggles is of course extremely problematic as well, especially as the donor will most likely be forced to align with the government, thereby often risking losing legitimacy *vis-à-vis* the target groups. To believe however that social, economic and technological change should be able to take place without some kind of political confrontation, as development thinking suggests, is, however, an even more unrealistic agenda.

Another way of reintroducing politics within the discussion of development is to reintroduce global politics of trade and inequality. The collapse of the dependency paradigm in the seventies, the ascension to supremacy of the neo-liberal economistic ideology of the World Bank concretized in the structural adjustment policies of the eighties, and finally the venue of discourses of democracy, decentralization and sustainability in the nineties, have led to a lack of focus, in fact a virtual absence of mention of the obvious facts that a country like Burkina Faso has become drastically marginalized within the last 20 years. Prices of the primary export commodity cotton have plummeted again and again in the eighties, dropping to a fourth in 1990 of what they were in 1980. In the nineties, producer prices have been fairly stable, due to the devaluation of the CFA in 1994, which has, however, led to sharp increases in input prices (EIU, OECD 1988). Gold prices have likewise dropped in the course of the nineties (Danida 1999c). These rather disastrous economic trends are widely overlooked when the "crisis" of Burkina Faso is discussed. This is all the more surprising as the Burkinan rural producers have proved to be quick and keen to respond to market incentives (OECD, 1988). A reverse in this trend would however involve a shift to old political agendas like "trade, not aid", and would mean that benefits would have to be subtracted from European and American producer and consumer interests. An unpleasantly political agenda.

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