

DECENTRALIZATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN SENEGAL

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THE INTERPENC'S ROLE IN WOMEN'S ACCESS TO LAND

1. WHY FOCUS ON WOMEN'S ACCESS TO LAND?

Decentralisation in Senegal has now been going on for approximately forty years. The public authorities claim loud and clear that they are the ones behind this choice that appears to be one of the most significant political statements of this past century. However, it is necessary to acknowledge first of all that considerations were received and actions undertaken, on the one hand, by rural producers, who actively and repeatedly expressed their rights to have the relevant policies and agricultural inputs at their disposal; and on the other hand, simply by rural people who have not grown weary of expressing their wish for a better acknowledgment of their concerns through mechanisms that would bring them closer to their government. The State could not remain insensitive for long to all the appeals coming from the growing civil society. A territorial reform was thus adopted in 1972. It focused on the reality of "rural communities", defined as people united by links of solidarity that derive from their vicinity and who are capable of finding resources for their own development.

In a first attempt (in 1998 – 2000), HORIZONT3000 aimed to strengthen the Rural Council for decentralized development with a project.

2. STAKEHOLDERS IN THE PROCESS

Five large groups were identified as being the main stakeholders in the project:

- **HORIZONT3000:** its intervention in Senegal was based on the deep concerns expressed by the various rural populations.
- **SYMBIOSE:** A development organisation that has always understood the responsibility it had in getting access to methodologies and participatory approaches contributing to strengthening the movement of decentralization. Yet, it has been acknowledged that Symbiose did not always reach its expectations. Its collaboration with HORIZONT3000 enabled it to be better structured and to make full use of its role to support the local development.
- **THE RURAL COUNCIL:** It is the local development monitoring body, the window to the project. However, this institution regrouping men and women is essentially made up of members elected on a list-basis. These lists had been put together by political parties. For some time, this structure has been a major problem when mobilising the various rural actors.
- **OTHER TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS:** These are economic interest groups, village associations for development, sports and cultural associations, support groups, individuals and contact people who identify themselves in the project's philosophy and approaches.
- **THE SUB-PREFECT OR THE ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITY:** He represents the national executive, ensures a quality control and deliberates on all the questions that may have an impact on the rural community's development.

3. SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION

From the beginning of our project, our team invested their efforts into performing an institutional analysis that resulted in the incapacity of the Rural Council to sustainably take responsibilities, in terms of support/advice given to rural actors. The local elected members are so politically mobilised and solicited that it is almost impossible for them to commit to counselling or follow-up evaluation tasks. A consensus was reached regarding mechanisms or methods that would guarantee the project's durability: a Technical Executive Group (TEG) with 5 members was created to allow the entire community to actually take part in the local development. The following issues immediately arose:

- The main one amounts to an extreme politicisation when choosing members of the TEG. Two political trends deriving from the socialist party (of equal numbers) coexist. Thus, the councillors hide back in their political belongings to justify their choices. As there are an odd number of prospective members, the councillors have advised that the team should be re-elected every year. This is how it worked over the two-year period the project was running.
- The second issue encountered consisted in choosing the village that would accommodate the three mills. A study was commissioned that mainly took into account four criteria: the total population, how much villagers invest in growing mil, the provision of infrastructure designed to grind millet in the village, polarization or distance from the rest of the infrastructure.

After the study had come to an end, validation feedback was given to all local elected councillors. It received mixed reactions. To some extent, the overwhelming majority welcomed the methodology used, yet, it wondered how pertinent the choice of villages was.

- The majority raised the issue of rural tax payment to turn down the option of selecting Kouloumbodou, the village that holds the largest millet production. For them, this means prioritising cash inflow at the expense of labour relief for women and a wise use of millet.
- These same people believe that, although it is already the centre point of a number of producing small villages, Santhie Koyel is not large enough to accommodate a mill. This village does not stand out through its political activities.

It becomes clear that all these questions have a political colour. Kouloumbodou is the headquarter of most of the politicians belonging to the opposition, the minority. Santhis Koyel has no interest in politics. Tired of the constant complaints that came from a large group of councillors, Santhi Koyel's chief grew weary and rejected the choice made for his village.

Without the administrative authority's determination and the Technical Executive Group's commitment, the study's conclusions would have been questioned, if not dismissed. Never has there been a meeting with the Rural Council that did not take place in an atmosphere of great antagonism.

After the project ended and during a self-assessment meeting, all of the partners were moved by the Rural Council's pertinence in being able to truly boost the local development. Many testimonies were given amongst others:

- The President of the Council who drew the public's attention on the number of entreaties that came from members of his institution and on their incompetence regarding key areas of the local development management.
- Many of the councillors who called for a coordinated development of an apolitically-based community Organisation that would become the natural vessel for development partners, agreed that the Council should consider this initiative and that a clear protocol on the roles and responsibilities should be counter-signed by the administrative authority.
- The Sub-Prefect and the various associations were satisfied by this proposal, which was a great step forward for them in the decentralisation policy.

And so, the decision was made to promote a large consultation group that would enable **the aforementioned Organisation to be established.**

4. ESTABLISHING THE PENC AND INTERPENC

4.1. “Pencs”

It was necessary to first of all work towards the creation of Kayemor’s “penc”. Amongst others, the following stages were cleared:

- An orientation meeting was held with HORIZONT3000, the Rural Council, partners for development, and the Technical Executive Group (TEG). A methodology that would promote an inclusive and bottom-up approach was suggested and implemented. This methodology would include all of the villages as well as the technical services that play a part in the rural community.
- A local team was identified and trained to the techniques of communication and to the reality of the rural community. The groups to be consulted were located collectively and a schedule of activities was established.
- Village consultations made it possible for an agreement to be reached regarding the type of organisation to be set up: a **keppaar** is established in every village. It brings together sectorial expertise and opinion leaders.
- Every village represented at the administrative council of the “Penc”, which is a community based organisation on a rural community level. **The President of the Rural Council and all of the presidents of this same council are involved in this penc.** This structure is inspired from the desire for democratisation, fluidity and a better processing of information between decision-making bodies in the local development.
- Elaborate protocols that highlight the roles and responsibilities of the “Penc” and of the Rural Council, i.e.:
 - The Rural Council provides information on the organisations and NGOs that aim to work within the rural community
 - It is of utmost necessity for this Council to rely mainly on the “Penc” when undertaking awareness raising, training and social mobilisation activities.
 - Thus the “Penc” keeps the Council informed on all the achieved results.

4.2. INTERPENCs

There are now nine other rural communities sharing the same space and almost the same environmental realities as Kayemor. They found their inspiration in Kayemor’s example to create an INTERPENC where the Presidents of all the Rural Councils and “Pencs” sit together. It now has an office and three commissions:

- An environmental commission
- A socioeconomic commission
- A commission for partnership development.

This interpenc holds meetings every three months to agree on the past and future activities. In fact, this INTERPENC has jurisdiction over everything that is related to policies:

- Defining a programmatic focus in the Kaolack region
- Monitoring the quality of “penc”-led activities
- Establishing programmes that go beyond pencs, for instance:
 - Implementing and operating a community-based radio

- introducing significant improvements to the issue of natural resources management through conventions
- Developing advocacy and lobbying actions initiated by the INTERPENC's specialised commissions. The INTERPENC's strategies feature in four examples:
 - The Interpenc has become involved in a battle to reset the fair price producers should have the right to claim for their groundnuts. We must put an end to ravenous appetites of speculators. The INTERPENC became a storage agency and buys groundnuts at the price fixed by the State.
 - The Interpenc has eased access to inputs for producers. The commission was in Dakar for a week and finally obtained 40 tonnes of fertilizers from ministerial authorities, which were then to be redistributed to the various "pencs".
 - During the locust invasion in 2008, the Interpenc played a crucial role in promoting methods to control their spread, inspired on ancient practices that mobilises the entire working population.
 - The Health Department recently decided to turn to the Interpenc in order to efficiently fight against Malaria. Thanks to its wide influence and to the army of skills it encompasses, the Interpenc was able to carry a positive message; that of prevention in the most remote villages.
 - It supervises all activities that contribute to opening up the area (building gabions and installing stone barriers).

This conference gives the Interpenc the opportunity to give evidence on the journey it has undertaken in granting **women access to land**.

5. LAND MANAGEMENT: A HIGHLY NATIONAL ISSUE

During the colonial era and for some time, land was acquired through fire or axe rights in Senegal. This means that the ways to gain access to land varied from region to region and from group to group. In any case, this has given rise to a number of great landowners here and there.

- In 1964, the law 64-46 of 17th June establishes national domain land and lays down an intangible principle: any unregistered land or any land whose ownership had not been recorded in the mortgage registry after the time set by the legislator shall automatically be considered public property. This law strives to remove the customary approach to land ownership that benefited some important families and to socialise them. Although it is not adapted to some realities related to tradition, it has enabled some families deprived by history to have access to land.
- The reform adopted in 1972 gives rise to rural communities and gives Rural Councils the power to allocate or take away land.
- The law 96-07 of 22nd March 1996 allows Nine areas of competence, including land management, to be transferred to local authorities (common region and rural communities) but with the Sub-Prefect's approval, the State representative.
- The agroforestry livestock framework law adopted in 2004 focuses on creating an attractive and incentive environment in rural areas. The aim is to transform family farming by promoting family farms and favouring the use of more intense, diverse, sustainable and environmentally friendly systems over extensive production systems.

Yet, it is important to note that the rural populations never remained inactive. They demonstrated and eagerly defended their traditional regime. This stems from the fact that public goods most often belong to a lineage. Indeed, land management is usually and mainly the eldest child's responsibility, particularly in the case of men, which is in line with an almost customary way of managing the land.

Women's relation to land has always been obscure. None of the above mentioned stages have focused their efforts in granting women the right to access to land. In some areas, women are pushed aside mainly for mobility reasons; in other areas, they are completely unaware of procedures of land ownership.

6. A WELCOMED METHODOLOGY

The INTERPENC encourages each "penc" to conduct the following activities with the support of Symbiose:

- Train village leaders and local contact people to communication and feedback techniques.
- Launch awareness raising campaigns on women's access to land in every rural community with local councillors, technical support and Kayemor's theatre company (mainly made up of rural councillors) participating in large. Every village is concerned. During this campaign, particular attention is given to chiefs of villages and landowners.
- Establish a basic land registry which holds women's requests for land.
- When informed that the requests had indeed been submitted, the Interpenc and the Rural Councils perform a check.

7. REGISTERED RESULTS

First of all, a basic land registry was established in the area.

Second of all, the following areas of land were allocated:

- 14 ha in Kayemor's rural community.
- 10 ha in Ngayene's rural community.
- 4 ha in Medina Sabakh and Porokhane's rural communities.
- 3.5 ha in Taiba Niassène's rural community.
- 2 ha in Gaintes kayes's rural community.

Please note that these results essentially concern women collectively through their associations. More efforts are being made to better allocate land to isolated women through awareness raising campaigns that will focus chiefly on women.

8. LESSONS

Verify that:

- Local organisations are efficient with relevant goals, representative through their area of influence, have a creative thinking and undertake profitable actions.
- There is a strong link between local Organisations and local authorities, who enact the States programmes as well as the concerns of the various populations'. These two governing bodies must not compete against each other. The choices made by the members of the Interpenc must be delivered with fluidity.
- The importance of chiefs of villages and landowners is effective.
- This will give rise to a group sufficiently pertinent who will be first in line to take care of the negotiations to be conducted.
An eminently inclusive and participatory strategy
- The approach must first focus on groups of women as their preferred mean of change. These same groups of women will be the voice of individual women.

- It must be a bottom-up approach and must include all villages.
- This approach will rely on local promoters with training to participatory promotion techniques. They will be able to guarantee follow-up throughout.
- Establish continuous communication between actors on all levels.