

**FOs' Participation in Public Policy:
Lessons and Recommendations
from the "Paar Network" Capitalisation Documents**

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Introduction

The Analysis and Documentation Done in the Framework of the Paar Network Project

As part of the project aiming to build the capacities of networks of agricultural organisations when it comes to agricultural, food and rural policy (Paar Network)¹, now reaching its conclusion, eight of Inter-réseaux Développement rural (IR) partners have produced experience analysis papers on diverse subjects, in close partnership with the FOs in the region. These papers are now available online on IR's website (<http://www.inter-reseaux.org/groupe-de-travail/dernieres-capitalisations-menees/>). The conclusions drawn from these capitalisation papers are full of lessons for FOs, and for FOs' (technical and financial) partners and African policy makers equally.

Among these 8 studies, 4 deal with the subject of FO participation in public policy. They consist of:

- a general analysis of West African FOs' participation in agricultural and trade policy, with an emphasis on the regional level (ISSALA, LARES, JADE, ROPPA);
- a paper collecting and analysing data on smallholder farming in Senegal (FONGS);
- an analysis of FOs' participation in two dossiers in Senegal: land policy and the Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations (IPAR, CIRAD, CNCR); and
- an analysis of the necessary complementarity between value chain FOs and generalist FOs, focusing on Burkina Faso and Benin (AFDI, IRAM, CPF, FUPRO).

Four other papers cover more specific topics:

- analysis of the experience with the Rural Code in Niger (AGTER, E-Sud, AREN, LandNet, West Africa GRAF);
- the local dairy commodity chain in West Africa: the role of PROs and small- and medium-scale ranchers (AVSF, AOPP, ICD, VSF B);
- the evolution of local cereal prices in Burkina, Mali and Niger over the 2001-2010 period and their influence on warrantage in Niger (AVI); and
- training future agricultural leaders: an analysis of the accomplishments of FORMAGRI (Madagascar) (FERT, AFDI, FORMAGRI).

This summary proposes to draw crosscutting lessons from these papers on the subject of FOs' participation in public policy, which shall act as a common thread for this paper. It offers an overall vision, but does not aim to provide an exhaustive report on all the analyses and proposals contained in the individual works. The idea is to highlight some of the lessons that FOs can learn from these experiences and invite discussion, even if this means overstating certain positions.

Current Opportunities and Threats for FO Participation

- Over the course of the past decade, West African FOs have encountered major successes that had until then been unequalled when it came to public policy negotiations, in particular on the regional scale. The elaboration of a regional common agricultural policy for ECOWAS States that included farmers' demands in regard to food sovereignty and support for smallholder farming is the clearest illustration of this.
- FOs have also encountered obstacles, which could threaten or weaken their influence over public policies and programmes at a time when "the hardest part still needs to be done": participate in implementing these major orientations, and prove that they are the right ones to respond to farmers' expectations and societal challenges as a whole.
- The 2008 crisis and the worries about skyrocketing agricultural product prices worldwide triggered an awakening among the authorities and new forms of policy voluntarism. These carry opportunities, given the extent to which governments' and donors' eyes and concerns are focused on food and agriculture issues, but they also carry threats as one can see with the rush to grab land. The temptation to ignore smallholder farming deemed to be insufficiently productive and invest heavily in industrial farming that would do without peasants has never been greater. As a result, there is a real need to develop the arguments based on the economic weight of smallholder farming.
- These elements are coming together today to give the issue of FOs' participation in public policy a degree of seriousness. Effective and legitimate methods of consultation urgently need to be found,

¹ Programme fund by French Development Agency

and we urgently need to provide ourselves with the means for dialogue focused on action and results.

The work analysing and documenting experiences within the framework of the PAAR network project draws three main lessons from the experiences analysed so that in the years to come FOs can increase their influence over policy orientations and the coherence of policy implementation with the options chosen:

- FOs will need to improve their ability to formulate proposals;
- States need to be given an incentive to keep their promises; and
- Consultation methods need to be more effective and legitimate.

The following elements are drawn from the PAAR capitalisation papers. They constitute a selective reading of these papers. Footnotes refer readers to the documents from which they are drawn.

Lessons from Experience

ROPPA's commitment in the ECOWAP dossier shows that:²

- **FOs played their role defending the interests of smallholder farmers well and obtained real progress on this matter.**
 - Several overarching principles defended by farmers were ultimately able to be approved, in particular recognition of family farms, the promotion of food sovereignty, regional preference, and differentiated protection.
- **FOs owe much to charismatic leaders, a regional administration favourable to them, and a network of affinities.**
 - ROPPA's undeniable success on this dossier must not cause one to forget a context that was particularly favourable: regional integration in full revival, an administration that viewed FOs with a benevolent eye, and advisers won over to the farmers' cause. ROPPA was able to take advantage of this context and maintain friendly relations with decision-makers.
- **Arguments remained generic, however.**
 - One can regret a lack of clear position in the final text, opening the door to multiple interpretations, in regard to both the outlines of smallholder farming and the content of food sovereignty.
 - In actuality, the smallholder farm concept covers a very wide range of production structures with highly diverse evolution dynamics, ranging from very small, multi-activity farms without production means other than labour that are only weakly inserted in the market to holdings of substantial size, strongly inserted into the market, that have significant production capacity and use outside labour—farms focusing on household self-consumption, or local food product markets, or even cash crops and international markets.
 - Similarly, the food sovereignty concept is often poorly understood by government authorities and donors. "For the first, the concept is ambiguous and often assimilated with the concept of food self-sufficiency. Indeed, the concept does not specify the minimum rate of self-supply for each product or group of products that would guarantee this sovereignty or sufficient independence in regard to outside supply. Does it include or exclude dependency of production systems on imported inputs? Is sovereignty envisaged and attainable on the national or regional scale? What consequences does it have for dependency in regard to genetic progress (GMOs)? For technical and financial partners, the concept conveys a protectionist connotation, contrary to international commitments in regard to trade."

² See ISSALA, LARES, JADE, ROPPA

- Ultimately, the choice of which agricultural model to promote was not made clearly and definitively. Similarly, the preference for local products was ripped to tatters by States during the first food crisis (2008).

- **And, we are currently entering a phase that is becoming more and more operational, making the debates more technical.**

While the main outlines of the common agricultural policy have been enacted, the question of implementation has not yet been resolved, implying additional investment by FOs in regard to the details. The big challenge facing FOs will be how to move from a “co-designer” role to that of “co-implementer” in regard to ECOWAP. This role will oblige FOs to formulate very concrete proposals, especially in terms of instrument choice and policy targets, trade offs between subsidies and credit, targeting and location of pilots, etc.

ROPPA’s commitment in the CET and EPA dossiers shows that:³

- **FOs also played their role defending farmers’ general interests well and made real progress.**
 - Regarding the CET: Early on, ROPPA sought to ensure coherence between agricultural and trade policies as these two tools must work together to support smallholder farming. Believing that opening markets to agricultural imports penalises local agriculture, and taking note of a regional body with trade authority, FOs campaigned, via ROPPA, for an increase in customs tariffs in the framework of ECOWAS. In this way, they contributed to the creation of an additional band taxing certain products deemed to be sensitive (the 5th band). They would have liked to obtain more (50% rather than the 35% obtained).
 - In regard to EPAs: For equivalent reasons, ROPPA began work on EPAs. Farmers saw these trade liberalisation agreements between the ECOWAS zone and its largest trade partner as a threat. Many campaigns, events and delays contributed to the suspension of these agreements today, whereas the Cotonou Agreements that had previously governed trade between the two regions became obsolete at the end of 2007.
- **They owe a great deal to a combination of outside factors.**
 - In regard to the CET: FOs benefited from the influence of the regional “giant”, Nigeria, in favour of heightened protection.
In regard to EPAs: In this area, ROPPA joined a large civil society movement and certain LDC States hostile to the agreements.
- **The complexity of the topics could cause difficulties for FOs.**
 - In regard to the CET: The region’s trade policy raises numerous problems with coherence, whether between levels of governance or between sectors of activity. ROPPA’s challenge is to manage to mobilise adequate skills to work on this highly technical dossier.
 - In regard to the EPAs: ROPPA was influenced by NGOs and experts in these negotiations and found it difficult to assert its specificity. It notably defended a more nuanced position than the NGOs, which were staunchly opposed to any agreement. But its voice was ultimately little heard.
- **The method of consultation penalised FOs.**
 - In particular, the negotiating timetable: discussions spread out over time, sudden acceleration then slowing of the pace, last-minute invitations, simultaneous discussions, etc.
 - The length of the negotiations and the simultaneous nature of several areas of discussion in the negotiations made it difficult for FOs to invest satisfactorily. The consultation modalities did not allow FOs to get organised to play their role.

³ See ISSALA, LARES, JADE, ROPPA / IPAR, CIRAD, CNCR

The experience of Senegalese FOs' involvement in land policy shows that:⁴

- **Senegalese FOs were exemplary pioneers in running a national debate on a subject as complex as land tenure.**
 - The approach taken, typically bottom-up, presents a method to build collective peasant expertise. It is based on running numerous grassroots workshops, and prior training of peasant organisers. A teaching method was tested then standardised to facilitate pooling of results (analytic grid, standard report format) on the regional level and then the national level.
 - This approach proves that one can run vast reflection on a complex subject, on the condition that it touches on peasant's experiences. It also shows that consulting grassroots members has two main virtues: provide keen proposals based on peasant experience and also mobilise members and by so doing provide the organising FO with "political capital." Indeed, these talks were an opportunity for FOs to build mobilisation skills that would later be used when the negotiations with the State stalled.
 - This approach was used again during the process that led to the passage of the agro-sylvo-pastoral framework law (ASPFL) in Senegal. It also inspired initiatives in other countries in the region (Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso).
- **Yet, the Senegalese State is conducting a parallel policy.**
 - The exemplary nature of this participatory reflection process on land issues did not lastingly convince the Senegalese State. We know the strategic importance of this production factor for both the State and farmers. During the reflections on the ASPFL, while the discussions advanced on all other subjects, they ran up against the land issue. To save the negotiations, FOs and the authorities agreed to leave this issue out of the framework law and postpone the debate on the issue. In the end, it would seem that the Executive Committee created a hidden parallel working group on land reform from which civil society organisations were excluded.
 - Similarly, in regard to agricultural framework laws, the results are currently not up to the hopes they had raised. In the three years following its enactment, very few ASPFL application decrees were published. The national consultation framework established by this law has not met to date. Requiring massive, sustained investments over time, application of this law seems to lack the necessary means and political will.
- **Donors and experts have sometimes upset the social dialogue.**
 - Here, at issue is the obligation for States to fit into certain frames of reference imposed by their partners (methods, agendas) and the recourse to outside expertise, which does not always facilitate capacity building for executives and policy institutions in charge of the dossiers or dialogue and consultation with the rural world. The methodology to formulate NAIPs is given as an illustrative example of a gap between the priorities seen in value chains.
- **FOs' arguments need to be refined, notably the agribusiness/smallholder farming duality, seen as inoperative.**

FONGS's experience shows that:⁵

- **Senegalese FOs took note of the need to arm themselves with knowledge of smallholder farms (SFs) to formulate a lucid and convincing defence.**
 - This long-term work by farmers' organisations constitutes a documented demonstration of Senegalese smallholder farms to produce the food needed to feed the population of Senegal and the measures necessary to improve farm performance.
 - A typology of SFs based on level of security (secure (10%), fairly secure (70%), insecure (20%)) is offered, accompanied by a typology of areas according to the pressure on natural resources, and a typology of rural economies based on the importance of agriculture and other sectors of activity. Security is evaluated in an overall manner based on (i) farm performance and productivity (1. secure farms capable of developing; 2. fairly secure farms with room for possible progress; 3. insecure farms whose survival is threatened), (ii) mastery of land (1.

⁴ See IPAR, CIRAD, CNCR

⁵ See FONGS

farms that have no land problems; 2. farms that have space but cannot fully use it; 3. farms blocked by land issues), and (iii) household economy (1. agriculture-based economies; 2. unstable economies; 3. new economies, based on income from emigration, non-agricultural incomes, etc.).

- **The approach proposed constitutes a possible option to collect basic data.**
 - The approach taken to do this work started from an analysis of smallholder farms conducted by associations belonging to FONGS. The characteristics and results of a sample of 711 farms in the various regions of Senegal were described and discussed among farmers (38 association workshops organised from March to May 2009). A comparative analysis of these results by agro-ecologic zone was then done. This work was a step in a process that is continuing today in Senegal and spreading to several other countries (smallholder farm observatory).

The CPF's and FUPRO's experiences show that:⁶

- **States and donors encourage FOs to specialise in value chains whereas FOs sometimes do a better job representing SFs, and crosscutting functions in FOs are indispensable. The two organisational models are not opposites but complementary.**
 - The advantages of structuring based on value chain: better targeted and more effective economic services; procurement corresponding to issues that farmers really encounter; professionalism building factor; prioritisation of actions and work organisation.
 - The limitations of this approach: more difficult to take into account the complexity of smallholder farming, and the risk of farm specialisation; splintering of resources and competition between FOs. The choice of value chains to support is sometimes questionable. Marginalisation of FOs in the policy dialogue, weakening the scope of peasant discourse, risk of dilution/political division among farmers' movements. Issues such as land tenure, finance, training, advice, etc. are not well understood.
 - All these are as many problems to which the overall approach responds.
- **FOs must be allowed to reconcile the value chain and crosscutting approaches.**
 - by building FOs' capacities and human resources;
 - by promoting an overall vision of agriculture elaborated in conjunction with FOs and other agricultural development actors; and
 - by establishing a conducive legislative and political environment.

Recommendations

Improve FOs' ability to formulate proposals

- **Why?**
 - Because FOs are judged by the government authorities based on the quality of their proposals*
 - FOs must prove that the results of joint policies are better than those of policies that were not discussed. This is the best guarantee that the government authorities will continue to call on FOs' contributions.
 - Because FOs must acquire more independence in analysis*
 - Today, the imbalance in negotiations to the detriment of farmers is frequently caused by a lack of expertise within FOs. For highly technical subjects such as agricultural and trade policies on the State level or in sub-regional institutions, whoever has the expertise has a political advantage.
 - Lacking sufficient in-house expertise, FOs often turn to consultants or NGOs to shore up their arguments. No matter how decisive and useful this recourse is, it raises the question of FOs'

⁶ See AFDI, IRAM, CPF, FUPRO

analytic autonomy. FOs lobbying the government have themselves been influenced by outside actors to the point of deviating somewhat from their objectives.

Because the subjects will be increasingly technical as policies are implemented

- The ability to formulate proposals is all the more important during the policy implementation phase, in particular for ECOWAP, which requires the parties involved go further into detail on the dossiers, propose tools, and learn from field experience. ECOWAP is now progressively starting to be implemented. The regional fund has been created, and the first endowment has been allocated from the ECOWAS budget. Task forces should be launched to design the tools to implement for a series of priority dossiers. This is the stage at which the general orientations will or will not permeate concrete programmes. We are at this policy's litmus test: it is in the interests of both States and farmers themselves that FOs do not miss this decisive moment. This process must be a long-term one (more than a few months). Such discussions require extensive preparation by FOs.

Because FOs' proposal potential is considerable

- FOs must be able to take full advantage of their experiences in the field. Innovations and modes of farmer organisation exist that should inspire implementation of the regional policy. If FOs are able to draw decision-makers' attention to local practices and innovations that have proven themselves, they will be playing their role fully. Finally, ECOWAP is an opportunity for successful local experiments to scale up and spread.
- In particular, the experiences, economic successes, and value chain FOs are often cited as able to convincingly influence government authorities: potatoes in Guinea, warrantage in Niger and dairy processing are a few examples among many. The capitalisation papers documenting these experiences can provide concrete ideas of measures to set up in which FOs will impose themselves as indispensable partners.

- **How?**

Invest more in preparing representatives: information, training, communication

- Preparing FOs for the discussions, especially elected officials, is unanimously described as fundamental. This preparation can take the form of training, debate, collection of data from the grassroots, in-house analysis and documentation.
- It also can take the form of learning of existing studies and analytic documentation.
- The key role of information and communication in policy negotiations is often stated. This role exists on all levels. When the FO is unable to obtain first-hand information on processes underway in a timely manner, it is inevitably pushed aside. Similarly, when FO leaders are not able to ensure that information circulates well within the organisation and transmit messages from the grassroots, they rapidly lose relevance and the ability to make proposals.
- FOs' capacity to make proposals raises the question of FOs' resources, both human and financial. These resources are generally insufficient in light of the amount and complexity of challenges, which in turn implies pressure on the agendas of leaders and staff and sometimes a harmful scattering effect in the strategies employed.

Set up a collective experience analysis and documentation system within FOs⁷

- It would seem that FOs' in-house expertise could be developed by recruiting specialised executives and training leaders as well as by formally analysing and documenting the collective knowledge and experience of FO members. The proposal has notably been made that the platforms and ROPPA:
 - ✓ set up technical units devoted to this work;
 - ✓ give some leaders responsibilities in this area of work; and
 - ✓ set up working groups, committees and thematic networks.

⁷ See ISSALA, LARES, JADE, ROPPA

Run a wide debate among FOs, on several levels⁸

- It is important that FOs decentralise the discussions as much as possible so that a maximum amount of experiences can be discussed and shared and a maximum number of leaders trained and informed.
- The issue of coordination among FO levels (grassroots, region, nation, sub-region) seems central. This vertical and horizontal transmission is insufficient today and penalises FOs.
- It is also important to step up the dialogue between generalist FOs and value chain FOs. The expression “farmers’ movement”—while it reflects the mobilisation of many FOs and their advance toward unity—should not, however, obscure the great disparities that still exist between countries and sectors, or the “centrifugal forces” that perpetuate a degree of fragmentation. Many projects, programmes, governments and donors see FOs as tools for development rather than as social movements. This is evidenced by the current trend of encouraging the structuring of FOs by value chain and ignoring “generalist” FOs in the name of a vision of development centred on economic issues alone and farm specialisation. This can limit FOs’ political power by restricting their fields of action to the provision of economic services.

Tackle hot topics⁹

- There are certain subjects that are difficult for both the authorities and farmers to address in West Africa: in particular the questions of the number of farmers, the economic size of SFs, the status of land, and the effectiveness of financing systems. The future unity of the farmers’ movement and its capacity to formulate innovative and clear proposals on strategic subjects will depend partially on the capacity to tackle these sensitive subjects.

The reflections would in particular benefit from being extended in two lines – lines on which FOs risk being questioned in the short or medium term:

- ✓ the future of smallholder farms: clarify the concept, describe their viability, report on the different types, evolution paths and perspectives for each type; and
- ✓ policy instruments: production support (how and whom to support?), market regulation (storage, price control, etc.), safety nets, etc.

Encourage States to keep their promises

- **Why?**

Because the policies proclaimed are not always the policies effectively pursued

- First and foremost, this is a democracy issue. Over time, we have seen the authorities become more open to social dialogue. It is not rare that FOs are invited to attend decision-making bodies at multiple levels of government, even the highest. But, as we saw in the examples cited above, this openness can sometimes hide less democratic intentions. Some authors speak of “displayed” vs. “real” policy to designate this double game. The reasons that push decision makers to give the appearance of listening to FOs can cover a wide range of things, from electoral calculations (peasant leaders in Mali took advantage of the presidential elections to demand a debate on an agricultural framework law) to the desire to look good to financial partners. These double games can partially explain some of the difficulties encountered when implementing policies and the contradictions between texts and realities.

For reasons of social peace

- It is also a social peace issue. In contexts where judicial recourse is sometimes failing, policy differences can easily lead to physical conflicts.

For reasons of policy effectiveness and coherence

- Finally, it is a public policy effectiveness and coherence issue. The case of the initiatives taken by governments following the 2008 crisis outside any consultative process is revealing. One such initiative is the Grande Offensive Agricole pour la Nourriture et l’Abondance (GOANA, or great push for food and abundance), a Senegalese government initiative whose connection with the ASPFL is difficult to see. Inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial policy coherence across

⁸ See AFDI, IRAM, CPF, FUPRO/ FONGS / IPAR, CIRAD, CNCR / ISSALA, LARES, JADE, ROPPA

⁹ See ISSALA, LARES, JADE, ROPPA

levels of government is also an issue. There is a theoretical continuum between continental guidelines (in the framework of NEPAD), regional guidelines, national policies and finally local policies. In reality, it often seems that sharp contradictions can be seen between levels. In Mali, there are now two “poles of elaboration” for agricultural policy: the AFL executive secretariat and the Ministry of Agriculture that is responsible for defining the NASIP in the framework of ECOWAP/CAADP implementation.

- **How?**

- *Expand “outside” alliances (beyond government authorities)¹⁰*

- One factor unanimously described as decisive in the success of FOs’ influence strategies is their capacity to forge alliances and federate a large number of actors inside and outside the rural world around their demands.
 - Alliances between FOs are seen as “obvious” alliances but constantly need to be deepened within countries, between countries in a given region, and on the continental and international level (south-south alliances as well as south-north alliances, etc.). In particular, alliances between value chain FOs and generalist FOs.
 - The alliances between FOs and NGOs are well known: there are several specialised in strengthening FOs, including in terms of advocacy.
 - Alliances with other value chain actors: it seems that a challenge for FOs is for them to forge alliances with less “obvious” alliances such as value chain actors. On trade policy issues such as the ECOWAS Common External Tariff, such alliances would probably have strengthened farmers’ positions advantageously. In the EPA negotiations, we saw the manufacturers’ association in Senegal produce lobbying that worked in favour of farmers’ positions. Processors and consumers were also cited.
 - The alliances with civil society showed themselves to be effective and an excellent way to increase States’ “accountability.”

- *Maintain a network of influence*

- Affinities with the media are also necessary: journalists and other opinion leaders must imperatively be included in FOs’ networks.

- *Develop a capacity for collective mobilisation¹¹*

- More generally, it seems that States must feel the force of social movements to fulfil their promises. FOs in Senegal have clearly managed to acquire significant clout, the effectiveness of which could be seen during the ASPFL negotiations. Yet, experience in Senegal shows that this is not enough.
 - Some authors insist on the importance of FOs holding a degree of “political capital.” This capital can be based in part on the charisma of their leaders, their strong legitimacy in the eyes of their grassroots, and their natural authority with outside actors. But this capital is also built up collectively and over time. A FO’s credibility can be judged in the light of its ability to mobilise its grassroots and take collective action. Each successful operation—whether union-related or economic, local or national—helps strengthen the political capital of the FO as a whole if it can be made visible.

- *Foster affinities within State bodies: elected officials and civil servants¹²*

- Finally, several authors agree that, to be heard, FOs must necessarily develop a degree of complicity with State bodies themselves. ROPPA’s friendly relations with the regional authorities was decisive in the success of its advocacy. This complicity should be extended and developed. But as much as capitalisation papers emphasise these successes, they also remind us that FOs’ actions in the region cannot be limited simply to regional advocacy. While regional integration in West Africa is growing and offers opportunities that FOs can grasp, several authors point out that the dominant level is still the State, and that the policies decided on the level of ECOWAS currently seem little restrictive, particularly as they only address the

¹⁰ See IPAR, CIRAD, CNCR / ISSALA, LARES, JADE, ROPPA

¹¹ See IPAR, CIRAD, CNCR

¹² See ISSALA, LARES, JADE, ROPPA / IPAR, CIRAD, CNCR

regional dimensions and not all of the prerogatives of an agricultural policy (subsidiarity principle).

- It is therefore important to foster affinities on the national level. Very often, FOs have no choice but to collaborate and risk being marginalised by the authorities if they appear to protest too much. This example reveals a FO that, having managed to reconcile power, was able to influence decisions but found itself in difficulty when its demands did not match the government's orientations.
- Elected officials (members of parliament, local officials) must not be forgotten.

Improve frameworks and modes of consultation

- **Why?**

Because the modes of consultation determine FOs' real influence over processes

- A large contribution from these analyses is the importance of the mode of consultation, that is to say the way in which consultation is conducted: the people and structures that are invited, when they are invited, who determines the agenda, the pace of meetings, etc.
- Very often, the way in which FOs are consulted determines the sincerity of the authorities' openness and therefore FOs' possible influence over the course of affairs: FOs' participation is completely different depending on whether they are invited at the last minute to a "validation workshop" to act as participatory window dressing, or are involved in the initial stages of reflection, have an influence on the agenda and can get organised materially to be a true source of proposals and consult their grassroots.

Because the relationship between FOs and government authorities remains highly asymmetrical

- While African States accept farmers' speech on technical aspects more or less willingly, they find it more difficult to accept as objections to policy. This state of affairs is linked to the lack of recognition of FOs as true social partners, that is to say as partners necessary to the production of policies based on sustainable compromises. We could expect formal rules on the dialogue between the government authorities and civil society, FOs in particular, so that the ideological and policy positions of government leaders do not upset the very existence of such dialogue. It is in this spirit that the ASPFL provides for the institutionalisation of a dialogue with FOs on issues that concern them by creating consultation bodies. This idea should be applied widely.

Because we observe considerable institutional confusion: we no longer know who decides...

- As several authors indicate, the institutional situation of West African States is characterised by a multiplication and segmentation of public policy negotiation arenas. On the supranational level, regional and continental organisations have opened new negotiating areas; on the local level, a decentralisation movement has been underway for several years; and at multiple levels, donors and outside actors—both bilateral and multilateral—have become increasingly important. This considerable institutional confusion penalises FOs and all of society: we no longer know who decides, we sprinkle territories with disjointed programmes, we no longer know which bodies to address to effect change. It would be necessary to enter into discussion with the government authorities and donors to clarify each party's role and decision-making processes.

... Notably because of the ambivalent role of the technical and financial partners

- The ambivalent role of the technical and financial partners: multiple projects and programmes complete and overlap the measures taken directly by national authorities, helping obscure policy elaboration processes. Donors' presence in policy negotiations is excessive, which prevents the emergence of true social dialogue and alters the notion of social compromise within societies. The fault is placed on the international foreign actors (donors and NGOs) who struggle to apply the principles in the Paris Declaration. This declaration, approved in 2005 and committing most donors and their partners, contained promises to improve the effectiveness of official development assistance. Among these principles, donors' alignment with policies set by countries and the harmonisation of their interventions figure as two confessions of the poor paths taken until then. However, nothing today would seem to indicate that these lacks of coordination with the central authorities and between technical and financial partners are things of the past.

- At the same time, it is undeniable that aid is strengthening FOs and giving them new opportunities. Some donors tend to include them in the elaboration of their sectoral intervention frameworks (World Bank, IFAD), at least formally. Others struggle to embody the participatory nature they promote elsewhere. This is the case with the European Union, for instance, that offered civil society a choice place in the framework of the Cotonou Agreements but was criticised by FOs during the mid-term assessment of the 10th European Development Fund. In the end, at the confluence of several spheres of decision, FOs themselves undoubtedly have a role to play in reforming aid.

- **How?**

Negotiate the rules of the game at the start of consultation processes¹³

- Formalise consultation frameworks: It is important to clarify FOs' regulatory framework and enable judicial recourse, define representativeness criteria to strengthen FOs' legitimacy, ensure minimum control (but not interference) to guarantee legitimacy and eligibility for public funds, etc.
- Several States such as Mali have for instance formalised consultation frameworks and in so doing "secured" and made sustainable policy dialogue with FOs.
- This formalisation also comports risks, as some States could take advantage of this opportunity to marginalise "bothersome" FOs and set discriminatory criteria.
- Negotiate the agenda: Several experiences emphasise the vital importance of mastering the agenda for negotiations. A FO cannot reasonably prepare if it is invited at the last minute. The government authorities need to commit to a schedule in advance and keep that schedule. But the agenda also involves the content of the talks: FOs must be involved in selecting the topics for discussion.

Optimise the role of partners¹⁴

The aim is to renegotiate the role of development partners in two directions:

- Maximise their positive influence over policy processes: Donors must stay within their role of supporting States and civil society for development, whether in terms of monetary transfers or the transmission of knowledge, in compliance with the Paris declaration. They can be important relays for FOs and can help ensure the fulfilment of certain public commitments.
- Minimise their negative influence: Donors can push FOs to disperse their efforts and upset the dialogue with the government authorities. The analysis papers propose to work on a partnership charter.

¹³ See ISSALA, LARES, JADE, ROPPA / IPAR, CIRAD, CNCR

¹⁴ See ISSALA, LARES, JADE, ROPPA / IPAR, CIRAD, CNCR / AFDI, IRAM, FUPRO, CPF