



DIALOGUE AT ISSUE: TOWARDS NEW FORMS OF PUBLIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN SENEGAL?

Amel Benkahla and Cheikh Oumar Ba (IPAR),
with support from Denis Pesche and Marie Hrabanski (CIRAD)

1. HIGHLY VARIABLE LEVELS OF POLICY PARTICIPATION

The various development projects and agricultural policies that have been elaborated frequently stress the “inclusive” nature of the processes carried out and especially the “participation” of producers’ organizations and civil society. But what exactly is meant by the term participation? Is the apparent will to include stakeholders in public policy development really reflected in the actual development processes? What progress is achieved thanks to these participatory methods and what is their true nature?

A distinction can be made between different policy processes that can all be described as what is generically referred to as “participation”:

Information and communication: decision-makers inform partners about negotiations but decide on the contents; this is a one-way process, but it can still provide useful elements for the partners and stakeholders concerned. Communication focuses on one or more messages that the decision-makers want to get across.

Consultation: decision-makers gather the opinions of the partners and stakeholders concerned, but without sharing power. The decision-makers keep control of the process. The decision-makers do not necessarily seek to create a debate between the stakeholders concerned for fear of the emergence of

positions that could be supported by coalitions. Consultation may also enable the development of arguments within a movement or coalition: in this case, movement leaders should gather ideas and proposals from members in order to build or enhance positions.

Dialogue: in this case, decision-makers enter into a dialogue with the partners and stakeholders concerned with a view to building a shared vision that can serve as a guide for action. Decision-making power still essentially resides with the decision-makers, although the latter seek to create dynamics of dialogue with their “partner” or “partners” in order to define common objectives.

Negotiation: the decision-makers and their partners seek to arrive at an agreement. To achieve this, they enter into a power struggle whose stakes include decision-making power, among others.

In the case of the first two points (information and consultation), the interactions between the actors are predominantly vertical. In the case of the second two points (dialogue and negotiation), the interactions are more horizontal¹. These different steps (information, consultation, dialogue,

¹ These elements are drawn from Beuret et al, *L'évaluation des processus de concertation : Relief, une démarche, des outils, La documentation française*, 2006, 145 p.

negotiation) follow on each other throughout the policy process, which can take several years. There are phases of acceleration, but there are also down times. In the end, actual time devoted to negotiation is infrequent and

often short, and often appears as a phase of acceleration within the broader policy process.

2. SENEGAL'S FORERUNNING POSITION IN TERMS OF DIALOGUE

Senegal was the first West African country to adopt an outline act on agriculture, forestry and herding (LOASP), in 2004. The act provided a frame of reference for the development of agricultural policies over the next 20 years. It was the outcome of a sweeping process of dialogue and negotiation initiated with civil society stakeholders and notably producers' organizations.

Senegal's National Council for Rural Dialogue and Cooperation (CNCR), the country's principal umbrella organization whose membership includes more than 28 national federations, called for an internal dialogue mechanism to be set in motion from the grass roots up to the national level, involving the principal production chains. Thanks to this internal dialogue process, it was able to submit an alternative draft of the bill to the government in only a few months, which better reflected the concerns of the CNCR in relation to the place of family farming and land reform issues.

The quick reaction from the CNCR was made possible thanks to prior gains made by the Senegalese peasant movement: reflection on family farming (1993-94), participation in the development of the PSAOP (1995-1999), the joint FONGS/FAO project on agricultural policies (1998-99), participation in reflection on agricultural and rural education (1998-99), internal reflection on land reform (2000-2003), etc.

This exemplary dialogue process between the government of Senegal and the Senegalese peasant movement opened up new vistas throughout the sub-region and inspired similar initiatives in neighbouring countries (drafting of an agricultural outline act in Mali, process ongoing in Burkina Faso). After decades of agricultural policies dominated by government programmes, followed by policies issued under the aegis of donors in the context of Structural Adjustment Plans, a new era had begun.

3. PROGRESS UNDERMINED BY RECENT INITIATIVES

This cooperation between the government and civil society that seemed to ring in a new era in public policy development unfortunately did not last long. The institutionalization of dialogue stipulated in the LOASP has not been put into practice. Although the implementing decree establishing the Conseil Supérieur d'Orientation Agro-sylvo-pastoral (high council on agriculture, forestry and herding policy)

was passed, the body is still not actually functional. In addition, there has been no real dialogue with producers' organizations or other economic players within the production chains on the agricultural policy initiatives undertaken since 2004 (special programmes, plan REVA, GOANA, biofuel programme, etc.). Land reform, the principles of which were laid down in the LOASP, although the act deferred the issuing of a land reform act for another

two years, is not making any real headway. Producers' organizations have not been included in certain working groups (Commission Nationale de Réforme du Droit de la Terre, the national land law reform commission, a new thematic group on land reform steered by the Ministry of the Economy and Finance). Generally speaking,

the work of different government departments is still relatively compartmentalized between the different Ministries, a situation that hardly facilitates involvement of producers' organizations in public policy development or development of positions and arguments to be submitted to the government.

4. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL OBSTACLES TO BETTER DIALOGUE

Several elements can explain the difficulties encountered in the framework of the implementation of truly participatory and communal processes involving all economic actors (producers' organizations, private businesses, etc.). States are often obliged to enter into certain frames of reference imposed on them by their partners (i.e. methodological approaches, sticking to schedules). In such cases, recourse to outside expertise is often preferred as the simplest solution, although it does nothing to promote capacity-building for the public executives and institutions in charge of the files, or to facilitate dialogue and concertation with rural

We sometimes wonder if frequent use of high-level expertise is not an obstacle to the implementation of constructive dialogue between stakeholders. For instance, the methodology used to formulate NAIP priorities based on simulations generated by social accounting matrices has not made it possible to establish a national dialogue with economic actors on the priorities and principal constraints encountered within the production chains. Initially, the proposed agricultural investment plan included virtually no measures to promote herding or the agrifood processing sector, whereas these two activities are important levers for development.

stakeholders (private sector, producers' organizations, civil society organizations, etc.).

Furthermore, the particularly take-charge mode of governance and the considerable institutional instability that have typified the last decade have not facilitated dialogue with agricultural professionals. Indeed, there have been no fewer than 6 different ministers in charge of the agriculture portfolio since the democratic change of government took place in the year 2000. Finally, the creation of a national union of farmers, herders and fishermen (Syndicat national des Agriculteurs, Eleveurs et Pêcheurs/ SYNAEP-Japando) was perceived by many rural stakeholders as an attempt to side-line independent unions such as the CNCR and, more generally, as the expression of a will for State control over the activities of socio-professional organizations. Presently, the government invokes the participation of that union in its national dialogue forums as a justification for the fact that it no longer leaves an opening for dialogue—and much less negotiation—with any of the other representative producers' organizations, notably the CNCR.

These different elements have led to considerable curtailing of social dialogue between producers' organizations and the State, which has culminated in an accentuation of the dichotomy between two different models and visions of agriculture.

5. FAMILY FARMING AND AGRIBUSINESS: OVERCOMING OPPOSITIONS

It now appears primordial for Senegal to move beyond its dualistic vision of agriculture in order to seek new avenues leading to enhanced synergy between production systems, rather than an opposition between family farming and agribusiness. Such a paradigm shift can only take place through contributions from all of the different stakeholders (government departments, producers' organizations, local elected officials, and technical and financial partners) in a context of renewed dialogue.

With this in mind, we have formulated a certain number of recommendations for the different stakeholders:

- ➔ Include all representative socio-professional organizations in the frameworks established for dialogue, in keeping with the spirit of the LOASP, by formalizing regular meetings between the country's peasant organizations and political authorities on major policies involving agriculture and the rural world;
- ➔ Identify and capitalize on innovative experiences implemented by producers'

organizations in the field, test them on a broader scale and refine them with support from external actors (research organizations, government departments, experts, etc.);

- ➔ Translate these initiatives and experiences into proposed agricultural policy measures, which can be developed at the national and/or sub-regional (ECOWAP/CAADP) levels;
- ➔ Promote sharing of experiences between States and support them in reinforcing their capacities and methodology in terms of participatory approaches;
- ➔ Promote the use of a methodology focusing on dialogue and implementing truly inclusive processes in the context of development of public policy frameworks initiated with the State;
- ➔ Encourage States to set up evaluation mechanisms including the quality of policy development processes, which would be subject to assessment by socio-economic actors.