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General Theme: Transparency and Social Responsibility in the Governance of Natural Resources in Francophone Africa and autonomy of the riverside village communities. Proposal for a method to update traditions for the sustainable management of natural resources

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Introduction

Since the great drought of the 70's, successive governments in Burkina Faso, following the example of the other Sahelian countries have become aware of the necessity to support people in managing natural resources. This realization was all the more necessary as the economy of the country is based essentially on agriculture and livestock farming; indeed, the primary sector contributes about 30% on average to GDP and provides employment and revenues to approximately 90% of the population.

In view of the continued degradation of its ecosystem, Burkina Faso has undertaken various activities not only to curb the desertification (planting trees, fight against bush fires and the rambling of animals, making the people aware of the state of degradation of the environment etc) but also to reclaim damaged land with a view to restoring the ecological balance (escalation of agriculture, use of organic fertilizer, development of new farming techniques drawn from traditional practices etc) Vigorous action was taken in particular to safeguard classified forest and natural forests.

In this last domain, since the 1980's, Burkina Faso has taken courageous steps as far as its strategic direction is concerned to restore the overall balance and steer the country towards a path of sustainable development.

In 1981, the country drew up a policy to develop classified forests, making the management of natural forests one of the cornerstones of forestry development.

In 1983, it equipped itself with a methodology for the evaluation of land for forest management and the establishment in the field of an experimental research plan applied to natural forests.

In 1986, it embarked on the management of forest with the participation of the riverside population groups.

In March 1996, the country availed itself of a national forestry development programme which opens an avenue for the completion of a national heritage management programme within the framework of the National Action Plan for the Environment.

On 31 January 1997, the National Assembly voted a Bill pursuant to a Forestry Code for Burkina Faso. This Bill was promulgated on 17 March 1997.

The implementation of texts of a strategic nature, which also take into account the concerns of the international community as regards the management of natural resources and sustainable human development, questions role players on their availability to join forces with the people to manage the forests. Moreover, the strategic thrust of the 1996 Forest Management Programme pays particular attention to "the Involvement and empowerment of people through a participatory approach in order to achieve the effective participation of all the social levels on the community level as well as on the collective and individual levels[“.]

To involve and empower a riverside village community in the development and management of a forest needs the inspiration of its tradition which is a reference point, a framework of thought and customs that are the implementation of tradition, an ability to translate the dream

into reality. This step is relevant in a world searching for new bearings and where each society seeks autonomy in a desire to give the best of itself in building of a world with a more human face and paying attention to the daily concerns of the generations to come.

Communication that inspires the experience of a participative development project for the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku within the Bobo-Dioulasso commune presents this initial project and its objectives.

Then, as a second point, the approach which has allowed traditions in the management of the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku to be taken into account is presented.

Finally, as a third point, a method is developed to update the customs of the people in a way that promotes self representation which we qualify as positive. It is this image that the communities give themselves that allows their full participation in the planning of the said forests to take root and this in the spirit of sustainable human development.

1 The socio genesis of the project

The project for the participative management of the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku is located in the commune of Bobo-Dioulasso, seat of the administrative centre in the Houet province in the region of Hauts-Bassins.

Since the 80's, the state of degradation of the Dinderesso and Ku forests classified by the Orders of 27 February 1936 and 13 January 1951 respectively, has required the energetic reaction of the Forest Services and the State to check if not put a stop to the anthropogenic pressure on these forests. The Dinderesso forest which covers 8 500 hectares and that of Ku of 115 hectares are the lungs of the Bob-Dioulasso town. In addition, they protect and conserve natural resources, including headwaters and an important water table which gives the town its character of a water tower and allows a permanent flow of watercourses. Several activities have been undertaken for the preservation of these forests from planting, through the opening up of firebreaks, space protection, creating awareness and also repression which unfortunately was often the method most used.

The envisaged objective by the administrative authority was to limit to the strictest minimum, any anthropogenic pressure and human presence in the forests. As can be expected, the results achieved during decades of endeavours to protect the classified forests of Dinderesso and Kou are below expectations. Force also has its limits.

To support the regional environmental authorities, the quality of life in Hauts-Bassins and its water and forestry services in the protection of the forests of Dinderesso and Kou, the Burkinabe State and the grand duchy of Luxembourg signed a financing agreement setting up the participatory forest management project for the classified forests of Dinderesso and Kou (BKF/007.PAFDK) which started operations in 2002.

Taking into account the results of earlier management, the BKF/007.PAFDK project received from its conceptual initiators the assignment to support the regional environmental authorities and quality of life in Hauts-Bassins in a specific way, with all the role players concerned with the conservation and recovery of the classified forests, and with methodological tools, materials and finance.

Furthermore, the project had to base its activities on the participation of the different role players and especially the riverside village communities as direct heirs to the territories taken up by the two forests.

Motivating village communities so that they participate in the development of a forest (especially after years of conflict with the authorities) means, firstly, to recognise the existence of these communities as living entities, animated by an individual and collective historical consciousness and thus a permanent quest for a better life. It is a question therefore of restoring their confidence and trust so that they contribute effectively to the development of a forest as their inheritance. It is a question of drawing from the “already there” to revitalise the forest and to receive in return, as a living human community, a breath of new life for the forests.

In opting for this venture, Project BKF/007.PAFDK stood up for a pioneering vision which¹:

- a) In its concept proposed a cultural approach favourable to the initiative for self management, with assumed responsibility and thus a culture promoting human rights
- b) In its approach adopts a holistic approach calling on everything that can contribute to the development of the forests.
- c) In its implementation encourages a participative approach giving priority to the discovery, observation, listening, the analysis of data in order to ensure a better grounding of the project in its socio-cultural environment thereby contributing to a human future for the surrounding village communities throughout the region.

This innovative approach has its origins in a series of consultations organized well before the establishment of the project. Indeed, the development plan of the Bobo-Dioulasso community as well as the establishment of numerous projects on village lands to the west of the community having dispossessed several farmers from the riverside villages of the Dinderesso forest, increased the anthropogenic pressure on this forest. For those villages for which farming is the sole source of revenue, the community had to find new fields or allow them to establish themselves in the forest. Some notables had arrived to propose the declassification of the said forest to allow them to survive. Faced with such tension that could at any moment spill over, the administration, the technical services and the representatives from the riverside villages engaged in a think tank on the necessary safeguarding of the forests which were classified and indispensable for the survival of the riverside people. It was necessary “to take into account the concerns of the people while respecting the requirements of the law, namely the Forestry Code, the Environmental Code, the Agrarian and Land Reform Code and the other legislative texts contributing to the management of natural resources in Burkina Faso”.²

¹ It was a question of a gap because this was not at all a given. Indeed, at the heart of the public administration and notably the Water and Forestry officials were many who were opposed to this new step. Thus, there were stormy debates at a meeting of 9 March 2002 which brought together the highest authorities of the Houet province, the general management of the environment and quality of life, and the representatives of the river side communities in the Dinderesso and Ku classified forests between those in favour of the expulsion from the forest of any exploiter and those who wished to see the development of an agro-forestry to allow those from whom power had been withdrawn to eke out their daily living while keeping watch on the forest. If it had not been for the dexterity of the High Commissioner of the time, Project BKF/007.PADK would have been launched amid tension which would have dangerously compromised its future.

² SANOU, D.B., Co-ordination des villages riverains des forêts classés de Dindéresso et du Kou, Communauté villageoises de la Province du Houet et Projet BKF/007. PAFDK. Un exemple de partenariat pour l'aménagement des forêts classés de Dindéresso et du Kou, p.11, Bobo-Dioulasso, Edition du CAD, 2004

The different consultations showed that only dialogue, clarification and mutual trust could lead the people to make a contribution in an effective way to each project. A consultation framework was officially put in place on 27 July 2001 by the High Commissioner of the province charged with supporting project BKF/007.PAFDK in the implementation of its programme of activities.³ On 17 April 2003, the same authority put in place a census committee for the farmers of the classified Dinderesso forest following the recommendations of the consultation framework which at the same time encouraged the promotion of agro-forestry.⁴

In the months of August and September 2002 an information and awareness tour was undertaken by the delegates of the riverside villages. At the end of these tours, the general feeling which became clear was that the people were in agreement to contribute towards the development of the forests provided that the project to be installed permitted and supported agro-forestry, respected their traditions with regard to the management of the environment, authorised the rites and different cults on the altars situated in these two forests and that the administration would review its repressive methods so that the forest could contribute to the improvement of their living conditions.

This work upstream of installing the project allowed the authorities on one hand to become involved in the preparation of the land through the initiative of a dialogue about the difficulties that had troubled the town since the 2000s, the origins of which were, for a large part, due to the land ownership problem, and on the other to empower the municipal authorities to take on a more rational management of the communal land heritage. The different consultations also contributed to re-establishing trust in an administration which was perceived in many respects by the village people as an authoritarian administration and thus a replica of the colonial administration closed to all dialogue. This trust in the relationship between the administration and the village communities would later be a pressure valve for project BKF/007.PAFDK in the implementation of the work of the programme in its first phase. Indeed, not only was the project well received when it started at Bobo-Dioulasso but it received the blessing of important people from the different riverside villages, which is a rare thing.⁵ The commitment and participation of the people in the development of the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku, the heritage of the riverside villages, was therefore able to be effective.

11 Innovation through the updating of traditions and the taking root of the project

The consideration of local knowledge in the whole process of development is today an imperative in all societies. The development of forests does not escape this process. But it is

³ Idem p.99

⁴ See Order no 2003-0012/MATD/PHUE/HUE/HC/SG of 17 April on the creation of a census committee of the farmers in the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku. It is important to highlight that only the Dinderesso forest pertains to agro-forestry because the Ku forest is considered in the region as a sacred forest and thus naturally closed to all farming by tradition in the field of the management of the environment

⁴ Speech of Sanon Sogosira, president of the co-ordination of leaders from the riverside villages in the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku, on the occasion of the visit of the national director of Luxembourg development co-operation in the archives of the Sogo Association.

⁵ Speech of Sanon Sogosira, president of the co-ordination of leaders from the riverside villages in the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku, on the occasion of the visit of the national director of Luxembourg development co-operation in the archives of the Sogo Association.

one thing to recognize an approach but another to apply it. In Burkina Faso, since 2002, the introduction of local knowledge in development has been an expressed political desire. This political desire has materialised through the creation in 2002 of a Centre for the Analysis of Economic and Social Policy (CAPES)⁶ and at its core is a network for knowledge management in Burkina Faso (RGC-B).⁷ The innovation of Project BKF/007.PAFDK thus found fertile ground when it was implemented.

The results of the consultation sessions in which the administration engaged before putting in Project BKF/007.PAFDK having been well appreciated, were pursued to show the administration's determination to involve the people in the development of the forests, with the intention of making them the first beneficiaries. From time to time the project management and the village elders engaged in dialogue on the project's objectives, the results achieved midway and the expectations for the next steps.

The village elders constantly recalled their support for the project and the method they wished to see promoted so that they could be recognised as living communities seeking an improvement to their identity, partly as a result of the achievements of the project activities.

And so at the launch of the project's reforestation campaign in July 2003 they stated that: "The management of the two classified forests has a living memory, a history with which the different riverside communities go back in the past forever, through these spiritual and cultural places of worship or through these painful traces of ranking during the Second World War for strategic objectives and the management of property rights by the State after independence."⁸

The delegates reminded those responsible for the project that what had been undertaken together should be perceived as "a work of humanisation and positive social transformation. It should involve man with all his doubts, his aspirations and his faults but all the time believing in his qualities, his potential and his capacity to act in a positive way for posterity"⁹ They hoped that the project would take account of the human dimension which should contribute to the blossoming of man and the riverside village communities as well as all the citizens in the Bobo-Dioulasso commune.

⁶ Following the meeting organised by the Minister of Arts and Culture, 24 to 26 January 2002 on the issue of the integration of local knowledge in development programmes, a plan of action was formulated to integrate local knowledge in development projects. In order to implement the plan of action, the Centre for the Analysis of Economic and Social Policy (CAPES) was created in April 2002. The missions assigned to CAPES are:

- to assist with the conception and analysis of the broad strategic thrusts of economic and social policy
- to organise training on management and the analysis of economic policy in general and in specific in the fields of forecasting analysis
- to improve the availability and quality of information through the consolidation of a data base
- to assist in the creation of a network of experts in long-term analysis.

⁷ The mission of the knowledge management network in Burkina Faso (RGC-B) is to establish a link-up between the university environment and research, the role players in the field and the decision-makers for better knowledge and experience management taken from the perspective of sustainable development. This network commissioned a study on local knowledge in Burkina Faso, the results of which were returned between 22 and 23 December 2005. They would be published afterwards.

⁸ Speech of the Joint Committee of delegates from the riverside villages in the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku during the launch of the reforestation campaign of Project BKF/007.PAFDK, July 2003, Sanou D.B, Co-ordination of the Villages, Op cit, p. 118

⁹ Idem, p. 119

After the visit of the National Director of Luxembourg Development Co-operation to Bobo-Dioulasso, the riverside village elders expressed the same dream that of seeing the errors and mistakes of the past pardoned so that the project could be successful. The stated that: “We are called upon to heal the wounds of this collective memory by the humanization of our actions today and always having in mind that forgetting is not of this world in this scenario, but confession and forgiveness, yes! We must accept that the people have learned the lessons of history so well that today they are wary of this and no longer believe in the future and take this mistrust as a source of inspiration for our common mission of developing the two forests for the benefit of man”¹⁰

In practical terms, in the field, in April 2003, the project and the delegates from the riverside villages undertook a census of the farmers in the classified forests. The committee tasked with this census contributed to establishing a fruitful dialogue between the people and the institutional role players to make the farmers aware of the role that they must play in the implementation of the project. After this census, it turned out that the biggest trees were found in the fields of the villagers.

The riverside village delegates organised themselves to serve as the co-ordinating interface between the traditional elders and those responsible for the project. This co-ordination initiated several meetings with the elders to list all their concerns in order to discuss them with the project management and to capitalize on the projects.

The first project introduced by the project for execution was a study on the bobo-madare customs in the field of environmental management. This study, completed in February 2006, made an important contribution to the project activities because it not only presented an accurate picture of the management rules for land and natural resources in this culture, but in its recommendations gave the method to use to benefit from this heritage in the forest management project.

A second study was undertaken almost at the same time on putting into practice the customs in the two classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku. This was to identify all the customs the riverside village communities continue to practice in these forests and whether there was an impact or not in safeguarding them. The study showed that certain rituals such as initiation, the vigil of the non-initiated, the procession to return the relics to the village, large funerals which contribute significantly to the village identity and which team with people are always practised and have a definite impact on the forests.

Following these two studies, a third proposed this time by the project and using modern techniques (i.e using GPS) made it possible to locate and mark on a map all the altars and other areas of cult worship in the two forests. The elders agreed to guide the research team over the terrain¹¹. Not only were all the sites located and accurately marked on the plan but the team was able to study the state of the biodiversity at the sites, to note what was forbidden and how to behave at each site and to accept forest management proposals from the different people responsible.

¹⁰ Idem, p. 127

¹¹ Some of the local leaders who accompanied the team were more than 75 years old and besides pointing out the sites, they provided important information as much on the rites of worship as on the biodiversity found at the sites. The study lasted for longer than a month and the team covered dozens of kilometres, and climbed several hills.

The different studies were returned to the project and to the village elders who made adjustments to them. This approach facilitated the implementation of the recommendations of each study. And so, the joint committee of the riverside villages were able to acquire a tree nursery for the production of local tree species to reinforce the vegetation at the cult worship places and cultural sites. Every winter, different villages order plants for the reforestation. More and more villages, other than the riverside villages of the two classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku, obtain fresh supplies at the joint committee's tree nursery for their tree planting event

From then on, the riverside villages made a commitment to monitor their cultural sites in order to enforce the prohibitions including the prohibition on cutting a few roots whichever these may be and to protect any animal that is found there. In addition, the different villages have taken over the rites which took place at the different altars. For other rituals such as initiation, funerals, the vigil of the non-initiated or the feast of the return of the relics back to the village which require the exploitation of certain resources, a request for authorisation is addressed to the project which examines it and follows up.

To undertake a participative development project requires an approach which reinstates the collective memory. It is in this sense that the joint committee of the riverside villages, the customary notables and the project management of project BKF/007.PAFDK have engaged in a research study in order to find the indispensable cultural mainsprings for a real participation of the village communities. It is an socio-genetic approach that allows the village communities to better control their evolution over the long-term and to know themselves better in order to form authentic communities. By allowing the people to provide information on their important legacy so as to manage the natural resources of their environment, enables them to contribute to updating a method and to participate in universal initiatives in the field of the rational management of natural resources which after all are not inexhaustible. An approach like this gives them the necessary tools in their efforts towards self representation and therefore in their quest for an identity.

111 Updating customs as a basis for self representation

The approach observed thus far in the management of the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku would have no meaning if, at the end of the day it did not envisage the improvement of the image that the riverside village communities have of themselves.

1. Self representation: a concept

From time immemorial, people have endeavoured to render what is absent or invisible present in their everyday lives. So, they have put mechanisms in place and made them work to make the spirit receptive to that which is not visible to them but was important in their lives through an object, an image, a name or a text. For example, in families, an altar is erected to the ancestors to remind them at each important moment in family life of the living presence of those ancestors. Thus, it is appropriate to say that in order for man to position himself in the universe, he needs a past, a history and bearings which are mainly his ancestors. The representation thus takes on the character of a sign compared to the potentiality which is the action. This is also true of a group which wants to keep something in its memory, create a link, make sense of it. The altars in the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku fulfil this mission.

[Autonomy that a people can make for itself, the capabilities that a human community has to give itself a living image, an inextinguishable sign of who one is and therefore the possibility to give a virtual image of oneself, is a first condition for the success of any project. In reality, it is this that engages both individually and collectively in the process of any meaningful social transformation.]

Self representation is firstly a question of memory, that is, it is based on that which in the past has indelibly marked the spirit to the point where it becomes a ritual which unifies the members of the community and gives a meaning to their lives.

Then it is dependent on the willingness to gather from the scattered elements of memory that which is necessary to build the present. This is not to repeat what past generations have created in their time but to build from a tradition and customs that which is consistent with the current era. This is historical consciousness which constitutes culture.

Finally self representation is a function of the dream that a community has of the future or even of the concern it has for the everyday life of future generations. Self representation commits communities that are aware of their mission

Self representation engages communities aware of their mission of becoming shared experience in initiative and foresight.

The image that people create of themselves is the driver of identity which as Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo says appears like: The thing that distinguishes us beyond the constants of homo sapiens...identity is the difference. This difference, of course, is not essential to human status, otherwise we would speak of racism, but it nevertheless constitutes the essence of identity.¹² Identity is one of the sovereign values for which men are prepared to die. Identity as self representation is not a frozen image. It is dynamic according to what has gone before to the context of the moment, the look of others and future projection. A wise Bamanan vouches for it in these terms:

“I bi yèrè filè mi yè, i tè o yè. Tow bi file mi yè i yè o de ye”

“That which you believe you are, you are not. But one is what others see in us”

Said in another way, the eyes of others allow us to correct the image one has of oneself. Self representation is thus an ongoing work supported by a perseverance in reading about the past, the present environment and in the idea of the future.

2 Self Representation a prerequisite for the project

The riverside village communities in the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku have accorded and continue to accord an important place to history. They have managed to develop a sense of continuity with their past and therefore an identity. For centuries there major concern has been to give themselves a visible and credible image beside those of the other peoples of the region.

¹² KI-ZERBO, J., *Repères pour l’Afrique*, p. 63, Dakar, édition Panafrika, 2007 (A sense of orientation for Africa)

Firstly, their approach was based on an indepth knowledge of the tradition which goes beyond the simple transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. Tradition here is a process through which the past with all its content, continues to make itself present and active. Tradition is not an attachment to the past, rather, it is of the order of matter, a framework of thought marked by a an unchanging point of reference, in a word ideology developed through the ages which gives life and dynamism to society. In the name of this tradition the villagers periodically visit the community altars to seek out the spirits of the bush and the ancestors to ask for the blessings of the ancestors in the rainy season or at the end of the harvest to thank them. This is why the quotation says:

“Dan kan tè sa, nan kan tè korobo, ni i gninèna i jujon ko, i laban bè dankabanan”

“The word which gives life to man never dies and the mission that is predestined for man does not explain itself; he who forgets his origins must expect a terrible end to his days”

Tradition also gives to the village communities an identity, a personality and gives the capacity to pick oneself up from the great challenges which occur every era. Tradition as a framework for reflection is the point of departure of any project of society and therefore engages the individual and the group in an action that satisfies the concerns of the present and the needs of the future departing from the inspiration of the past. It is necessarily a springboard for these riverside village communities living around the forests who want to project themselves into the future.

The second point of reference for the self representation of village communities is custom which is only a term for the implementation of tradition. Custom transforms dream into reality, theory into practice. Custom is therefore not a mechanical repetition, devoid of meaning. It is a commemorative act which puts different generations in touch and in communion with one another for the period. It is the place where people go back to their roots and thus a matter of consciousness and active relationship with one’s ancestry.

If it is true that repetition strives as much as possible to respect gestures, words, clothing, ritual, equipment, architecture etc in the riverside village communities in the forests of Dinderesso and Ku, custom is not fixed as we have been able to ascertain. It adapts itself according to circumstance and the overall context.

All that remains in keeping with the origins of the tradition is thought that gives meaning to the custom and which is essential to the memory links of those who have been initiated for cohesion within the group.

The consensus sought through the practice of custom is based on the community of faith, faith being the solid reality on which every society is founded and which teaches a moral code, for individual and collective behaviour. It is therefore the source of culture and the group’s image.

The third reference **point** to self representation is the story which tells of the events and facts of previous generations. This function is reserved for specialists: the griot (poet-praise singer-storyteller), the blacksmith and the sage, real repositories of oral tradition. And in the words of Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo: “a sense of history to the Negro is a dynamic where man has his place but it is holistic man with a social dimension, that is why this sense of history is the foundation of a particularly deep patriotism. Nowhere so much as with them, is

the nation composed more of the dead than the living. The living are only a minute minority bound to precise duties with regard to the members of the community who are no longer there.”¹³

History as the practice of custom is based on the same solid reality: that which is sacred. The village communities mentioned here consider themselves to be sacred history because in the tradition, man himself is a sacred being. And when history is told, the whole human being, the family and the village are jubilant, start moving in the steps of the dance or in congratulating the griot or the blacksmith who tells the tale so that he tries harder to remember more facts and events.

For the village communities, the veneration of the ancestors is the recognition for service performed by these predecessors, their commitment to find answers to the questions posed to them in their time, their ability to continue the work of their predecessors and their charity in having prepared the ground for the future from which the generations of today will benefit. In their acts of remembrance, the village community is an indispensable means to social cohesion and the image it offers of itself to other communities.

In contrast to what we often hear, the village communities have experienced over the centuries and continue to experience today a dynamism that comes of being certain to continue the story and thus become aware of their history and their responsibility in the present and facing the future. Indeed, when the one officiating at the worship at the altar, says in addressing them: “We follow in your footsteps” “Ki fugoma mèn do”, it is not to repeat what these ancestors have done but to draw inspiration from their actions and gestures to create the present.” By going into the forest to carry out periodic sacrifices, for them this is to remember the mission of safeguarding the environment in general and the forest in particular. The riverside communities living around the forests of Dinderesso and Ku are capable of rebirth and provide assistance to the preservation and management of the forests.

111 Updating customs and self representation

The customary code which regulates the management of the environment in the riverside village communities, reveals, if there was still need to do so, what these communities have managed to create by virtue of the past. They have in fact designed and implemented customs which have bridged centuries or even millennia. These customs have contributed to the emergence of new behaviours according to the times and thus to the image that these communities have given of themselves.

1. Seize what is already there as a basis for self representation

The customs that the riverside village communities acquired and which govern the management of natural resources avoid the lawless use or even the squandering of this heritage. They therefore invite man to behave with dignity. They come to rescue man face to face with his destructive instinct to make him aware of the need to preserve and enrich the “common good”. Traditions give man and the community an image that is in harmony with their environment, and thus communities which are an integral part of nature. They also give

¹³ KI-ZERBO, J., *Repères pour l’Afrique*, Op.cit, pl 32 (A sense of orientation for Africa)

them the image of living communities conscious of mutual respect, the love of one's neighbour and therefore in search of a common future.

Before the introduction of any custom, there is first the individual and collective awareness that what is being conceived will strengthen community cohesion and thus improve how the community sees itself. It is this consciousness that underpins a lifetime of tradition because it relies on respect for others, love for oneself, one's community and other communities.

Customs are the result of reflection, of the design and creation of past generations who make an active perception of history possible and give meaning to the life of village communities. Each of the traditions and customs which flow from them carry within them jewels, the fruit of thousands of years of research and practice. They are therefore an intellectual heritage that we cannot ignore as soon as there is talk of self representation. Any community which is not connected to its roots cannot achieve self representation and thus a real and meaningful social transformation and development. The discovery of the rich heritage of the past in the management of natural resources is therefore a vital task for man and for the project to manage the forest for present and future generations.

Proponents of the customs of the riverside villages in the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku present their places of worship in these forests as memorials and whenever they are back there, they hold commemorations, they recall the work of past generations and in this way they remember their mission. This is why they refuse to let go of their traditions, at any rate not in their time. They expect the younger generations to support the thought and promotion of customs and traditions. It is therefore a commitment on the side of the international community in this gigantic work of upgrading the traditions because they are the basis of self representation and the effective participation of communities in the management of the forests.

At the end of the day, the customs and traditions that some see as the vestiges of the past are an important part of cultural heritage. They are even more important because they connect the present generations to those of the past and those to come. To ignore "what is already there" in the legislation on the management of the land and forest resources is like building a house on sand.

2. Updating the spirit of customs

The customs and rites practised in the forests are the fruits of a world and village community view. In the mindset of the Madara, man belongs to nature which is composed of the visible and invisible. The invisible, here, is the most important because it is the most powerful and the strongest. Through their links with the invisible the village communities are able to compare, to distance themselves from or to correct if necessary. Thus they become actors in their own history, the architects of their own identity, giving themselves an image to present to other communities who by appraising it can contribute to improving it. In this way, history, the science of change, gives meaning to life. The story is "know thyself on a scale of the people" "yèrèdon" as the Bamanan say.

The desire to know oneself better, to deepen one's identity while being inclined to adapt the customs and traditions in time is the cornerstone for any legislator today. In the customs and rituals that animate them periodically, there is this life, this meaning that people give to life,

this desire to live together and live together better, which should contribute to a deeper meaning to modern law and to give it the respect of all the citizens.

Bringing customs up to date of necessity requires another vision of the world which transcends purely economic and material needs. It is not only to know the customs, sites and rituals as well as the stepping stones to allow modernity to take root but also and above all a test of the interpretation of texts and ritual actions that nourish and help control the impact of humans on the forest.

It is also important to know and respect the customs of those who practise them. But today, many village elders are notably reluctant to provide information on their customs and rituals. Their reaction is understandable. Several researchers have paid visits to the villages and the final result has been the destruction of the image of the community through the denigration of customary practices. Added to this are the many development project co-ordinators, who in the course of their business have taken aside certain village elders who have dared to explain one or other practice. Knowledge of customs for their updating must be founded on mutual trust and above all the respect for the elders. In this environment, secrets only exist when there is a lack of trust.

In terms of method, initially, it should be the genesis of the practice, In what context it was conceived, established and what are the mechanisms that enabled it to function well and to be retained by the community. This method called cultural genetics requires memory work, the development of the imagination which together form the suite of relations to maintain with that which is not immediately present and which makes sense of human existence. Retrospective imagination for relations with the past, prospective imagination for relations with the future.

Cultural genetics also promotes the discovery of the holistic aspect of traditions. Indeed, customs hold their life span because they nourish the different components of social, cultural, political, religious and economic life. This method also allows the pursuit of the main thrusts in the diffusion of customs in a well defined space and from the use that is made of them. It throws light on the communities through the effect that it has on changes in time and space, it highlights the capacity that each community has to adapt to its time and thus to create new collective memories, allowing the identification of the factors that cause social change. Cultural genetics thus avoids the creation of myths from customary practices and traditions.

3. Towards better self representation for village communities

“For man to succeed in his mission depends firstly on man himself” say the Bamanan. Interviews with the village elders of the riverside villages in the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku reveal that they are not opposed to bringing their customs in line with the times. They have a worldview that includes within it the seeds of growth and progress, which predisposes an avenue to the universal. Putting traditions and customs on the backburner in the implementation of any project seriously hampers the village communities in their process of qualitative social transformation. It is clear that it is departing from one’s own identity that one takes one’s place in the world. Indeed, after becoming aware of oneself and the training of the mind that one succeeds in building one’s own image and a mature and authentic personality and that one regains stability and confidence in oneself. Only an authentic community is capable of renewing itself by correcting the distortions in the image it portrays of itself to another culture.

It is a question of drawing the best of oneself in suffering from meditation on one's roots and from the rediscovery of values embedded in centuries of research and suffering to contribute to the universal in construction. In honouring one's own culture, one is able to honour other cultures. Questioning the customs governing the management of natural resources of one's own ethnicity is at the same time to enquire about those of other races. This step allows the authorities to reread the texts on the subject of environmental management to enable the people to make of the development of the forests a means of renewing the representation they make of themselves.

At the end of the day, the self representation of the riverside village communities through the development of the forests aims to give them back their confidence. Today, they are fully aware of their responsibility in the conservation and development of the forests.

Confidence, one cannot say this often enough, is based on the experience acquired by a person or a community and which allows them to progress towards new values. For a large part, it is also the result of authority and love. Indeed, to feel oneself loved by another person can dissipate doubts on one's own capacities albeit slowly. And just like the individual, trust allows a community or a group to speak up freely and with conviction so that all challenges can be overcome.

Confidence bestows an inner joy because it allows an individual or group to participate in the positive transformation of their world and the world in general. It is thus dependent on how one thinks and it is on this that one must work within the riverside communities of the forests of Dinderesso and Ku.

The elders in the different villages are convinced that tradition and modernity go hand in hand. From the past one can create the new. Isn't this culture? Without these forests, the identity of the riverside villages would be undermined. To assist them to contribute towards the development of the forests departing from the experiences that each one of them has inherited, is to allow them to construct an identity that conforms to the local and the universal environment. It will lead them to self representation, to renew and make universal those things that they have acquired through experience in this process of a quest for an identity.

Conclusion

The awareness of the threats to the planet and to the future of mankind requires from each state and human community a sustained effort at preserving natural resources.

In Burkino Faso as in the different Sahelian countries, from the great drought of the 70's, the people have engaged in various activities aimed at limiting desertification. However, the results are well below the effort. On analysis, it appears that the methods and strategies applied up to now have serious gaps. One shortcoming, which is perhaps the most important is the ignorance of and disregard for the traditions and customs in different environmental policies. But any community which is formed has to equip itself with a suite of rules and practices which govern individual and collective behaviours and which give an image and a personality to the community.

The customs of the riverside villages in the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku are not only ways of acting. They are mostly a sign of belonging to a group and as a bridge between the ancestors of the afterlife and their descendants. These customs are reasonable, in

conformance with public order and thus human. In addition, they vouch for the decentralization and autonomy of the villages and thus consolidate the process of the integration of families and villages in the name of the Great Spirit Do. As the environment within these communities is considered as a “common asset” and therefore sacred, the customs that govern its management are almost similar in one village community or another. And so they can be a springboard for any project for the development of land or forest. In any event, the proposed participatory forest management of the classified forests of Dinderesso and Ku believed this and made the customs of the riverside villages a foundation to ensure the long life and sustainability of this work. This approach has restored the confidence of these people who are suddenly demonstrating again that they are communities capable of the proper management of natural resources in the image of the generations which preceded them. Making the most of tradition in forest management is, at the end of the day, a quest by the people to regain their confidence which has been eroded since the colonial period. This method aims at training the mind and gaining the awareness to achieve the development of a mature and authentic personality, that is to say, a personality which finds within itself the elements of its own metamorphosis for the most isolated communities, communities which have thrown away their crutches to walk unaided.

Thank you

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