

Issue paper no. 135

Participatory evaluation and budgetary processes

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March 2005



**International
Institute for
Environment and
Development**

Drylands Programme



**making
decentralisation
work**

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About the author

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ARED:	Associates in Research and Education for Development
CIDA:	Canadian International Development Agency
CLUSA:	Cooperative League of the United States of America
CR:	Communauté Rurale or Conseil Rural
GTZ:	German Technical Co-operation
IIED:	International Institute For Environment and Development
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisation
PAGERNA:	Programme Gestion des Ressources Naturelles par l'Auto-promotion
PE:	Participatory Evaluation
Sida:	Swedish International Development Agency
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFEM:	United Nations Development Fund for Women

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1. Introduction

In order to be effective, participation needs to ensure citizens can play a meaningful role in decentralisation programmes. One of the pre-requisites for a genuinely participatory system of democracy is a platform that permits continuous dialogue between all the actors concerned, underpinned by a joint analysis and identification of the actions that need to be taken. All the programmes currently promoting local governance recognise that participation can have a significant effect on the impact of decentralisation. As a result there are various approaches and methods being tried out and disseminated by multi-lateral and bi-lateral development agencies and NGOs (particularly World Bank, UNDP and UNIFEM; CIDA, GTZ and Sida; and IIED, OXFAM, CLUSA, IDESA, etc. respectively). These include gender-sensitive approaches, citizen juries and forums for public debate, as well as tools for tracking public expenditure, the national budget, participatory budgeting, participatory monitoring of public programme performance, community evaluation of basic service delivery, budgetary review by citizens, etc. While the ultimate aim remains the same, these mechanisms offer a wide range of entry points. This paper draws on experience using participatory budgeting in Fissel and Ndiagianiao, two *communautés rurales*¹ in the region of Thiès in Senegal.

It should be noted that the process started at different times in the two sites, and therefore followed different courses. The programme to reinforce popular participation was launched in 2001 in Fissel, with participatory evaluation (PE) of decentralisation as its entry point. The initiative on participatory budgeting in the two *communautés rurales* came later, in 2003, as a result of this initial process. The whole exercise was undertaken within the framework of the “Making Decentralisation Work” Programme in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal, launched in 2000 by the Drylands Programme of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), with funding from the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). Key aims of this programme include contributing towards the establishment of a political and institutional

1. Administrative grouping of the population: rural community.

environment that favours the emergence of democratic and transparent local authorities; developing inclusive and participatory local institutions; and building the capacities of local people to enable them to participate in and influence central and local decision-making processes.

The three main sections of this paper cover the key points of this learning process in the two *communautés rurales* of Fissel and Ndiagianiao. The first section presents a conceptual overview of decentralisation and popular participation. The second section summarises the steps taken in the participatory evaluation of decentralisation in Fissel, and the final section describes how a participatory budgeting process was set up in the two *communautés rurales*.

2. Decentralisation and popular participation

Decentralisation – a system of devolving power from the central State to lower-level structures – is now widespread in francophone Africa, although the powers and competences transferred vary greatly from one country to the next. Decentralisation is an instrument for strengthening democracy and popular participation in the management of local affairs. According to Rondinelli (in MacLean, 2003), it is *"a movement of political and administrative reform permitting the assignment of a variable number, and to varying degrees, of functions, responsibilities, resources and political and budgetary powers to levels below the State; that is, to the regions, districts, municipalities and organs emanating from central administration. It may also involve the assignment of functions and responsibilities to semi-public or private institutions"*. But for decentralisation to be politically effective, it is important that those to whom these powers are transferred are democratically elected.

This definition allows for various models or types of decentralisation, depending on the importance and extent of the powers and responsibilities transferred. The circumstances and contexts leading to the adoption of decentralisation processes are many and varied, determining the course selected by each country. Once under way, the acceleration or reinforcement of the decentralisation process is shaped by a range of factors, from national conferences furthering the democratic movement and the claims of groups who feel that they are marginalized or excluded from decision-making processes, to arguments about the efficiency of decentralised resource management, loss of central government legitimacy in certain countries due to the particular conditions in which that government came to power, the decline of the State advocated by the structural adjustment policies of the 1990s, and the central State running out of steam or being unable to fulfil its obligations.

It should be remembered that rural decentralisation is a relatively recent phenomenon in francophone West Africa, with the exception of a few countries like Senegal, where *communautés rurales* have existed since 1972. There are various reasons why certain countries are cautious, if not sceptical, about accelerating the process of decentralisation in rural areas.

First, the significant powers retained by traditional institutions in some countries do not merely counterbalance the new institutions established in the context of decentralisation, but undermine their legitimacy and efficacy. Lack of capacity at the local level is another argument often advanced to justify the authorities' unwillingness to transfer certain powers to local governments. And thirdly, the balance of power between the political authorities and other stakeholders is an important factor influencing the types of reforms or policies selected by the central State. Thus, the changes made to the institutional mechanisms of certain countries may have more to do with selective political interests than pertinent technical considerations. This was certainly the case in Senegal when the ruling party decided to create *communes d'arrondissement* in 1996,² partly to deal with the loss of control over large urban agglomerations in the region of Dakar, but also because of internal disagreements.

Despite its highly laudable basic principles, practical experience has shown that elements of bias and imperfections in the system of democratic representation can actually hinder genuine popular participation. The institutions emanating from decentralisation have not been entirely successful in reinforcing the numeric and strategic representation of certain vulnerable groups in decision-making circles. Indeed, in some cases they have helped transpose the types of power relations characteristic of the social structures in local communities into the management bodies of local government authorities. Thus, various mechanisms have enabled the traditional elites controlling social power to position themselves at the heart of local government institutions. The poor representation of women on municipal, and particularly rural, councils is a perfect illustration of this. Despite the long experience of implementing decentralisation in Senegal, women in rural areas still find it hard to compete with men for these posts, with the result that less than 10% of rural councillors are women. Although they constitute the most dynamic element of the electorate, just one *communauté rurale* of the 320 nationwide is led by a woman.

Also the electoral system in some countries does not permit certain members of civil society to stand as independent candidates at local elections, which means that a significant sector of society is excluded from

2. *Communes d'arrondissement*: subdivision of large communes (space and population) into smaller units to which some of the power of the large communes are transferred.

the management of local government authorities. Many of these authorities have failed to put in place inclusive management mechanisms that allow citizens to participate effectively in decision-making processes. The resulting crisis of confidence not only often leads to actions being poorly appropriated, but also means that local government authorities frequently find it difficult to collect rural taxes and mobilize the resources needed to fund local development.

These flaws in the system of representative democracy hinder the creation of new forums for expression that could help broaden the base of popular participation. This has significant implications, given that participatory processes can reduce the risk of error in the public sector. Taking the needs of civil society into account increases the likelihood of misunderstandings being avoided, improved communication and dissemination of information, the interests and concerns of citizens being integrated into planning mechanisms, and better political outcomes for elected officials through enhanced programme performance (Hentic and Bernier, 2000). Regarding this last point, it is worth noting that popular participation is not simply an ethical principle, but is also a means of reinforcing the performance of the programmes put in place. It involves all the actions, mechanisms and processes set in motion by citizens on their own account or through their organisations, in order to monitor public action or oblige those responsible for their implementation (the State, local government authorities) to account for their decisions. Greater popular participation can create the conditions to prevent power being re-centralised and decision-making bodies being monopolised by a local elite. Moreover, adopting a more participatory system of planning and management helps make programmes more relevant, efficient and effective, and the management of financial resources more transparent.

At least three conditions are required to put in place a genuinely participatory system. The first is an institutional context at central level favourable to the concrete expression of the principles underpinning participation. There is no doubt that over the last few decades the strengthening of democracy and adoption of a policy of decentralisation have provided an opportunity to reinforce social inclusion in Senegal. Secondly, the structures working to promote popular participation need to have inclusive procedures and mechanisms that allow local people real influence over the decisions taken. Thirdly, citizens need to have certain skills and capacities in order to influence decisions that directly affect them.

Box 1. Brief summary of decentralisation in Senegal

Decentralisation is by no means a recent phenomenon in Senegal. The first municipalities were created in the 19th century, although the first *communautés rurales* (CRs) were not established until 1972, and it took another 10 years for the progressive procedure to be rolled out across every region. There are now 320 *communautés rurales* spread across the 11 administrative regions of Senegal, in addition to 67 urban municipalities and 43 large *communes d'arrondissement*.

The decentralisation process has been consolidated in several stages since its inception in 1972. In the first phase, from 1972 to 1990, the administration continued to play a major role in managing local government authorities and wielded considerable power, particularly through the sub-prefect, who was the principal authorising officer for the budget.

This tight control continued until 1990, when the powers of CR presidents were extended to include budget authorisation, leaving sub-prefects simply responsible for *a posteriori* checks on the legality of the budget. During the same period, the status of municipalities changed significantly and mayors were empowered to act as executive bodies, replacing the municipal administrators who were civil servants of the State.

The major break came in 1996, when the regions were elevated to the status of local government units and nine areas of competence were transferred to the local government authorities.³ Unfortunately, failure to match this transfer of responsibilities with the requisite resources means that elected officials are still unable fully to assume their new roles. The questions of governance raised by extending the competencies of local government authorities are made all the more pressing by the widespread lack of institutional and individual capacities to deal with them. The poor performance of local government authorities is largely due to the fact that the required resources have not been transferred from the State, which is why lack of institutional capacity in *communautés rurales* is a key factor that needs to be taken into account in any effort to increase popular participation.

3. 1) Environment and natural resource management; 2) health and social development; 3) youth, sports and leisure; 4) culture; 5) education; 6) planning; 7) territorial development; 8) town planning and habitat; 9) land affairs.

3. Participatory monitoring and evaluation of decentralisation

Participatory evaluation of decentralisation was introduced in Fissel in response to local people's desire to participate more actively in the design and implementation of local development programmes initiated by their rural council. Meeting this demand meant increasing the methodological capacities of the different actors involved so that they could evaluate and monitor the quality of the services on offer and, crucially, formulate and develop mechanisms for implementing and monitoring actions for change. As we shall see, participatory evaluation is not an end in itself, but an entry point. It should be based on pertinent, collectively chosen criteria, and its relevance measured by the significance of the changes it helps bring about. The first stage in implementing this process of capacity building is to identify the key actors that will need to take part in the learning process.

3.1 Identifying the stakeholders

There are so many diverse organisations operating in the *communauté rurale* that it was hard to take them all into account. The first step was to map out the local institutions and identify a limited number of strategic actors whose involvement is key to the participatory evaluation process. The mapping exercise helped identify over 30 institutional actors intervening in the *communauté rurale*, analyse their roles and responsibilities in strengthening popular participation, and establish three groups of strategic local actors as the core of the reflection process.

These were the rural council, traditional institutions and community-based organisations (see Figure 1 below). They represent three forms of legitimacy and authority that have a considerable influence over decision-making processes and community participation at the local level. The first form of legitimacy is political. It is held by the rural council, which is legally authorised to manage the local government authority, mainly through the mobilization and allocation of the financial resources needed to implement decentralisation programmes. The success of popular oversight largely depends on the capacity and willingness of the rural council to put in place inclusive and transparent mechanisms that allow local people to participate in the decentralisation process.

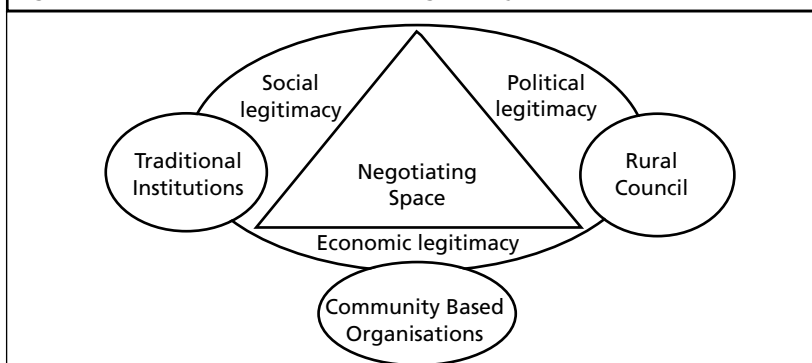
The second form of legitimacy is social. This is held by traditional institutions, which were identified as a key strategic group by virtue of their powerful influence over local people and their capacity to stimulate popular participation. Village chiefs play a particularly important role in Fissel, often assisting the administration and rural council and helping mobilize rural taxes.

Community-based organisations are seen as the organs of local civil society, endowed with both social and economic legitimacy because of their ability to mobilise local people around community development actions. From the village level upwards (village development committees) these organisations are central to all local development actions, and should therefore be at the heart of the process of popular oversight (see Photo 1 below). During the process of institutional analysis it became apparent that these three forms of legitimacy are not entirely separate, and that it is not uncommon for a single individual to play several roles in different local structures (elected local official, representative of customary authority, leader of a community-based organisation). To avoid confusion and help prevent the process being taken over by a small group of individuals, it is important that people with such status are able clearly to define the nature of their participation in the evaluation process.

Photo 1. Venn diagram of Langomack (village in Fissel CR)



Figure 1. Local actors and forms of legitimacy



These three strategic core groups were joined in the learning process by the administration and technical support structures, which do not enjoy the same forms of legitimacy.

3.2 Definition of a learning strategy

How are decisions made? Who makes them? How much do local people participate in the development of decentralisation programmes? What strategies do elected officials use to make their decisions transparent? What materials and tools do they use to make their actions transparent, visible and accessible? How are local people kept informed about the decisions that have been taken? These are all critical questions, whose evaluation by local actors can lead to actions for sustainable change.

The learning group approach was adopted in Fissel to give different local actors, particularly those belonging to the most vulnerable groups, the opportunity to help influence decisions at the local level. This approach uses an inclusive learning mechanism involving key protagonists at different levels and scales. There are certain pre-requisites or conditions that a learning group involved in evaluating decentralisation needs to fulfil to make it pertinent, inclusive and sustainable:

- All members of the group should have an interest in the problem being addressed by the learning process. This may be because they are running individual or institutional activities that could be reinforced by participation in a mutual learning process; or because they are directly affected by such actions and could make them more effective by participating in a process of joint reflection.

- Actors that have agreed to participate in the group should be prepared for their perceptions and practices to be considered and analysed by their fellow members. It is not a matter of focusing on any particular actor, but of sharing practices and experiences in order to enrich the mutual learning process. Thus, to make a useful contribution, participants should be able to bring a practice or experience to the learning group.
- The expectations, roles and responsibilities of the different members of the learning group should be clearly defined, to draw out complementary elements that the process can build on, and anticipate potential misunderstandings. In Fissel, this exercise was done with the help of the 4Rs Matrix shown in Table 1 below.
- It is important that the prerogatives of each actor are recognised by all concerned. In the context of social inclusion, it is vital that popular participation and oversight are not seen as means of usurping the legally mandated powers of elected officials. The synergy between legality and legitimacy should be maintained while respecting everyone's prerogatives.
- Actors require certain capacities and aptitudes to be able to participate in the learning process. From the outset, therefore, emphasis is placed on bringing members of the learning group up to the same level of understanding on various themes, ranging from the content of decentralisation to the roles and responsibilities of elected officials and citizens in the decentralisation process. To facilitate appropriation of the process by local actors, a team of 14 community-based facilitators was set up and trained on the content of decentralisation and the methodological processes and techniques involved in participatory monitoring and evaluation. They were chosen on the basis of: i) their ability to communicate; ii) the ability to write in French or one of the two main local languages, Serere and Wolof; iii) willingness and ability to devote time to the process. Their role is to facilitate reflection by the learning group, organise and run village forums to inform and train local people or assist them in preparing to set up a monitoring system, ensure that a system of monitoring and evaluation is implemented, co-ordinate data collection, organise analysis sessions, ensure that implementation of the actions identified is monitored, and build on what has been learned during the process.
- The methodological approach developed should take account of the different capacities and diverse actors involved. In Fissel, the learning groups used visualisation tools so that members could not only participate in discussions, but also use the materials to build on what they had learned (see Figures 1, 2 and 4, and Box 4).

Table 1. The 4Rs matrix developed by strategic actors in Fissel⁴

	Rights	Roles and responsibilities	Relations	Returns
Rural Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Resource mobilisation ● Resource management ● Representation of the <i>communauté rurale</i> ● Decision-making ● Recognition of its prerogatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accountability to the local population ● Putting in place information procedures and tools ● Availability ● Training of councillors ● Keeping councillors informed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● With the local population, build a partnership based on complementarity ● With the administration, obtain assistance with resources and capacities ● With the support structures, benefit from capacity building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Effective decisions ● Restored confidence ● Increased resources
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be informed ● Have access to decisions ● Monitor decisions ● Have the capacity to monitor ● Participate in resource allocation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Contribute (pay rural tax) ● Recognise the prerogatives of elected officials ● Actively seek out information ● Receive training ● Ensure the participation of vulnerable groups, especially women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● With the rural council, build a partnership based on complementarity ● With the administration and technical structures, benefit from technical capacity building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Better informed ● Access to better services ● Local people's capacities strengthened ● Powers of vulnerable groups reinforced
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monitor legality ● Monitor use of public resources ● Be informed about decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support capacity building of elected officials ● Support capacity building of local people ● Inform different actors about texts and laws ● Full transfer of competences and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● With elected officials, keep each other informed about the decisions made ● With local people, support their capacity building ● With technical support structures, technical partnership and supplies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administration brought closer to local people ● Effective programmes
Support structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monitor and evaluate programmes they support ● Be informed about the use of resources allocated to the rural council and CBOs ● Participate in deciding which actions to support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support capacity building of elected officials ● Support capacity building of local population ● Inform different actors ● Ensure the participation of vulnerable groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● With the rural council: information-sharing and partnership ● With the administration: information-sharing and technical partnership ● With local people: technical support with contributions from local people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Well allocated resources ● Programmes that meet needs

4. The 4Rs matrix (Rights, Responsibilities, Relations and Returns) is an interesting tool for negotiating these Rs. In Fissel it was used during planning of the process.

Box 2. Testimony from an extension agent

When the IIED trainers arrived we thought everything would be far too technical for us to understand, but they said they weren't coming with any set lessons – it would all come from us. This made us feel that we were part of the process, so we soon opened up. On the first day of training we looked at popular participation in local development, defined monitoring and evaluation and the roles and capacities of extension agents in decentralisation, and identified the different stages in monitoring and evaluating decentralisation. I came out of that first session feeling really pleased and reassured, before we'd even started on the real programme of work.

The workshops followed on from each other nicely, and the training was well done. You could see an improvement with each session, both in terms of the procedure and people joining in. These exercises were building up our training techniques without us even realising. The people from IIED often brought someone else along to talk about particular themes or discuss things with us – like the technicians from ARED and PAGERNA, and even someone from Mali. That was the day we were told that a workshop on participatory monitoring and evaluation was being held in Dakar, just like ours. So our visitors that day talked to us about what we'd been doing with IIED.

After the first phase of training, we went into test villages to put what we'd learned into practice. There are 28 villages in the *communauté rurale* of Fissel. Every village held a community meeting to see who was involved in decentralisation, and we found out what their particular interests were and how they affected the community, as we'd learned with IIED, to see whether they participate in local development and what their objectives are.

Once we'd identified our targets, we separated the women, men and young people into different focus groups. We did this because women don't say anything when they are with men, and the youngsters keep quiet too, out of respect for their elders. Splitting them up gave us a better chance of finding out what their expectations were, and getting them to answer our questions. After the village forums, we got together again in the centre at Langomack for a session to see what local people thought of our approach. In two of the villages, we had to go back twice and make door-to-door visits telling everyone what we were doing before we got enough people to come to the meeting. Sometimes 45 people came, and in other villages we got as many as 121 people. We chose 10 core people from each village to spread the word about the programme at their own level.

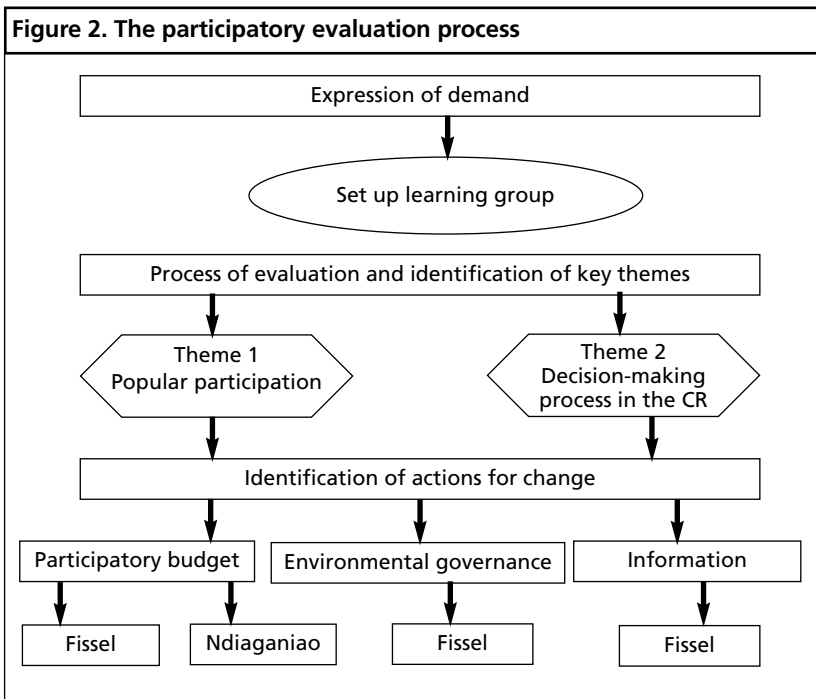
During one of the workshops on participatory monitoring and evaluation we talked about how long it has taken for women to get involved in decentralisation, and development in general. I was talking, and before I could finish this man interrupted, saying *"Men always take the lead, and that's how it should be. Women just can't be equal to men"*. I took no notice of his objections, and carried on: *"We're weak because men stop us from moving forward. What you've just said confirms this"*. Then the president of the CR, said *"The reality is that women aren't ready. They may outnumber men by three to one in a meeting, but instead of saying what they think they just fold their arms and leave talking to the men. Sometimes the men even have to ask them to say something."* So I answered, *"What women need is for men to start believing in them. Look at me, for*

example. To become a rural councillor, I had to begin by winning over my husband – and it wasn't easy, I can tell you. Once I'd done that, I said to myself that if I've got an opinion about something then I have to share it instead of keeping it to myself. That's how we women need to think, but we're still not bold enough to do it." This desire to stand up for ourselves and be counted alongside men is becoming more and more of a reality. We just need to keep going. IIED really helped me with this, because the training taught me how to get women's groups to participate and contribute financially. The programme gave us the opportunity to meet with others, discuss our experiences and problems and learn some interesting things. And today I'm doing everything I can to pass this on around my neighbourhood.

Adapted extract from the journal of Astou (2003).

3.3 Tools and methods for reflection

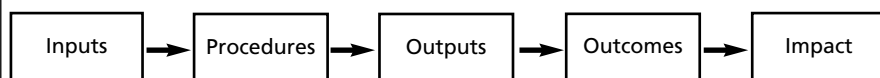
Figure 2 below illustrates the learning process followed in Fissel, showing how the participatory evaluation of decentralisation led to particular courses of action for change, such as the participatory budgeting process implemented in Fissel and Ndiagianiao.



On a practical level, participatory evaluation helps elected officials orient their actions to take better account of local needs and concerns. It is much more than a simple monitoring mechanism, as when it is properly understood and applied it can be used to reinforce the legitimacy of elected officials, insofar as any improvement in their performance will weigh in their favour when they return to the ballot box.

On a conceptual level, the monitoring and evaluation of decentralisation and local governance is a causal process linking inputs, procedures and processes, outputs, outcomes and impacts as shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Logic and levels of analysis in a system for monitoring decentralisation



Inputs. These include all the financial, human, material and even intellectual resources that are mobilized, and whose transformation into actions or programmes makes it possible to address local people's objectives and concerns. The significance and diversity of inputs directly influences the importance of the programmes developed. Most local government authorities are dependent on external sources of funding, being drip-fed contributions from the State, donors, NGOs and decentralised development agencies; so they are particularly hard hit when decentralised structures do not manage to mobilize local resources properly. Inputs are a critical element insofar as they largely condition the other elements in the chain of causality. As such, they are the first level that can be monitored to see how the nature of resources evolves, their quantity, provenance and use, etc. Monitoring and evaluation of inputs also shows how the capacity of local government authorities to generate the resources to pay for local development has evolved.

Processes or procedures. These are the decision-making mechanisms put in place to manage the resources of the local government authority; in other words, to transform inputs into actions or programmes. They are also indicative of the local government authority's capacity to develop an inclusive mode of functioning. The system of monitoring and evaluation shows

how its procedures have evolved by looking at the type of actors involved, their roles and responsibilities, interrelationships, competences and willingness or ability to be part of an inclusive and participatory process. All these factors will influence the nature of ongoing and future processes.

Outputs. These are the concrete accomplishments resulting from actions undertaken by local government authorities, ranging from infrastructure, capacity building and natural resource management activities to the materials and tools developed to disseminate information, etc. Many conventional monitoring and evaluation systems focus on outcomes that show how resources have been used, which can provide information about tangible achievements but gives no indication of the more qualitative aspects of these accomplishments. This is why it is important to have criteria for evaluating the results of decentralisation.

Outcomes. Analysis of results allows for a more qualitative assessment of the outcomes. They are among the most important indicators for assessing the effect that different programmes have had on the various actors concerned. For example, while it is important to evaluate the number of infrastructures established by local government authorities to see how financial resources have been employed, it is even more important to understand how these infrastructures function, which groups benefit from them and what types of service they offer. Monitoring and evaluation of results allows an assessment of such diverse aspects as the utility and relevance of the outcomes, the extent and manner in which they are used, their quality and effectiveness, and issues such as equitable access, etc.

Impact. These relate to the lasting, positive effects that decentralisation programmes have had on local people's living conditions. Evaluation of impacts is one of the most complex aspects of this process, as the impact is a deferred consequence of the action and may manifest itself outside the timeframe of certain monitoring systems, such as those covering short-term programmes. Moreover, the impacts observed may be due to the combined effects of several programmes, making it hard to determine the contribution that any particular programme has made to these changes.

The extent to which the elements of this causal chain are taken into account varies from one monitoring system to the next. Some systems are geared towards one specific aspect, while others opt for an approach that considers all the different elements in the chain. In Fissel, the emphasis

was on monitoring and evaluation of *processes and procedures* as an entry point.

The themes to be covered by the participatory evaluation of decentralisation were chosen at a local forum on that issue in Fissel. The diagnosis conducted during this workshop helped highlight several problems:

- Deficiencies in **information and communication**, especially the difficulty of making rural council decisions accessible to local people, and their lack of knowledge about the functioning of the rural council; also, absenteeism among certain councillors, who are therefore unable to account to their constituents;
- The **exclusion** of certain actors, such as women and young people, whose participation in decision-making processes remains very low;
- The slight **impact of decentralisation** on improving the living conditions of local people, which forces the most vulnerable groups to turn towards individual survival strategies and thereby reinforces their exclusion and marginalisation.

Two thematic entry points on processes and procedures were retained for evaluation on the basis of the results of the forum, in order to identify the kind of actions for change needed to improve the performance of decentralisation. These themes were 1) popular participation in the decentralisation process, and 2) decision-making processes within the rural council. Members of the learning group felt that these are two important parameters, which influence each other and have a very powerful effect on the impacts of decentralisation. Box 3 below shows the criteria selected for each theme.

Box 3. Retained evaluation criteria

Criteria with regard to popular participation

- Extent to which local people are informed about decisions taken by the rural council
- Involvement of local people in decisions taken by the rural council
- Nature of the roles and responsibilities assumed by local people
- Women's participation in decision-making (number and roles)
- Nature and extent to which local people assume responsibility for actions
- Local people's organisational capacity
- Nature of local people's abilities and competences

Criteria regarding decision-making processes within the rural council

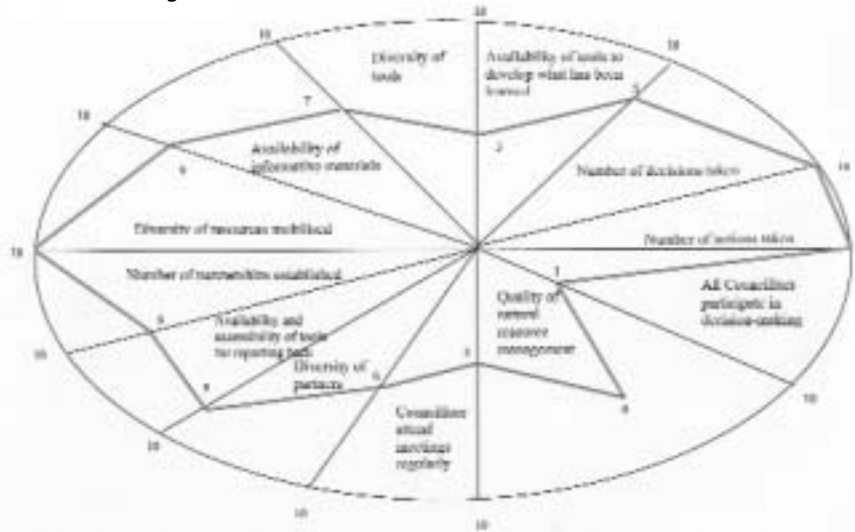
- Existence of tools to account for decisions made
- Existence of planning tools
- Existence of tools to disseminate information
- Diversity of tools
- Number of deliberations
- Nature and diversity of resources available to the rural council
- Frequency of rural council meetings
- Extent to which decisions are implemented
- Extent to which all elected officials participate in decision-making
- Types of procedures for managing financial resources
- Regularity and punctuality with which elected officials attend meetings
- Accessibility of materials to inform local people

Box 4. Summary of the process used to evaluate the retained criteria

- The learning group organised a forum to evaluate the criteria, using a visualisation tool (shown Figure 4 below) with a system of notation on a graduated scale of 1 to 10. Sub-groups (focus groups of key actors) chose criteria that were then synthesised by the entire learning group, which focused on selecting the most important criteria.
- The next step was critical analysis to identify the reasons or factors used to justify the assessment of each criterion, and synthesise the elements into strengths and weaknesses (see Table 2). This analysis is extremely important as it helps identify the underlying reasons for the problems experienced in implementing decentralisation.
- Priority courses of change were identified.
- Working groups were set up for more in-depth reflection on the courses retained as an entry point to launch actions for change. The working group considered the target objectives and activities to be undertaken, who will be responsible for them, implementation strategy, and possibly the date or period of implementation. This work led to the establishment of a calendar centred around three axes of change: 1) participatory budgeting, 2) environmental governance, 3) increased popular awareness through better understanding of citizens' rights and responsibilities. Each theme was covered by a working group. As already noted, the results of the working group on participatory budgeting are presented in the third part of this paper.
- Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the actions for change.

Figure 4. Examples of tools to evaluate the functioning of the rural council (A) and participation in the decision-making process (B)

A. Functioning of the Rural Council



B. Popular participation

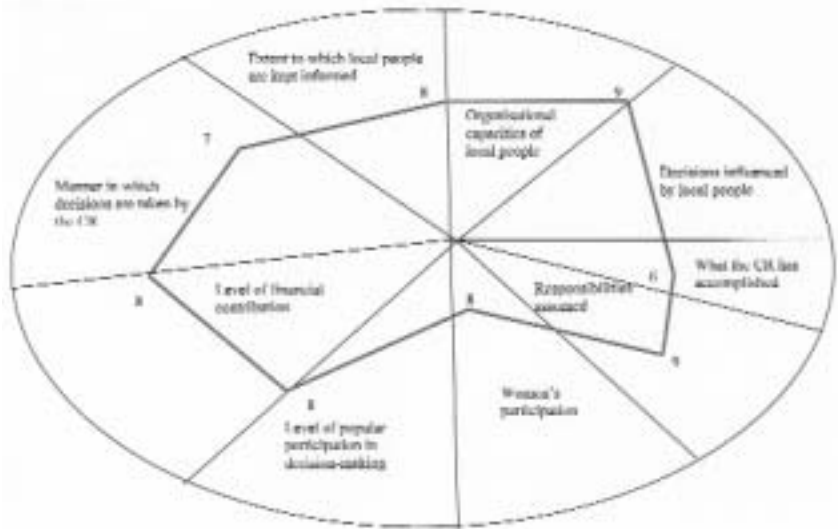


Photo 2. Evaluation of criteria for participation developed in Fissel

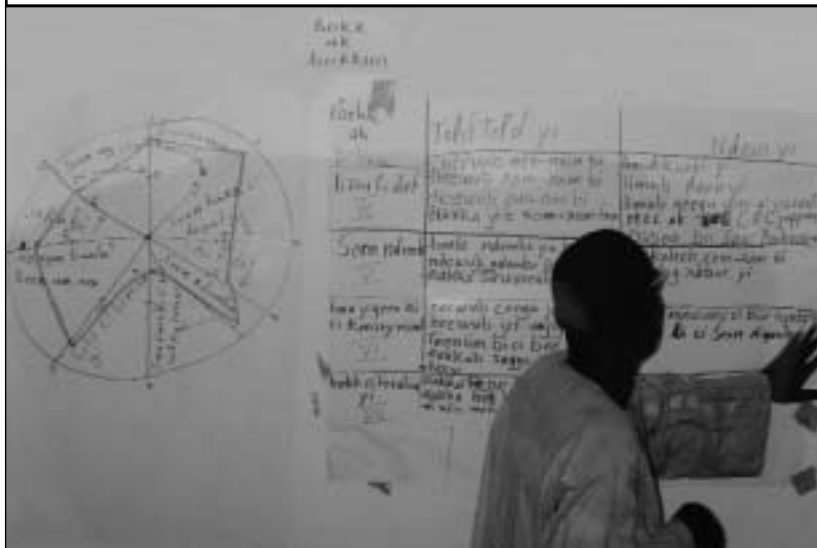


Table 2. Analytical matrix used during the evaluation of criteria for the decision-making process in Fissel

Criteria	Weaknesses	Strengths
Frequency of rural council meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Difficulty in bringing together rural councillors ● Each councillor is responsible for their own transport and food when attending meetings ● Difficulty in watering horses when travelling by cart ● Dissension within the rural council ● Late notice of meetings ● Difficulties in achieving a quorum ● Difficulty in reaching consensus/agreement due to political differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Decisions documented ● Decisions made in accordance with texts ● Decisions often well-thought out ● Decisions based on everyone's ideas ● Councillors well-informed about the decisions taken
Councillor participation in meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some councillors have several other functions ● Distance from certain villages ● Attendance-related expenses not covered ● Certain councillors unsure of their roles and responsibilities ● Lack of motivation ● Some councillors attend meetings but say nothing ● Lateness in sending out information or notice of meetings ● Absenteeism among certain councillors ● Variable levels of education among councillors ● Some councillors are only interested in certain activities ● Some councillors under-estimate the impact of their presence ● Lack of knowledge about rights and responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding of procedures and deliberations ● Development of decision-making capacities ● Those present express their point of view
Number of development partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The conditions demanded by certain partners are not in accordance with the capacities/means of the rural council ● Council finds it difficult to mobilize financial resources from local people ● Poor financial management capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Better training of local people ● Diversification of development programmes ● Development of the local economy

Criteria	Weaknesses	Strengths
Existence of planning and management tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of means ● Few development partners ● Decentralisation of responsibilities not matched by concomitant decentralisation of means ● No means of transport ● Existing materials not accessible to all councillors ● Existing materials do not cover all competences ● Little importance accorded to national languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Existence of a functional office ● Existence of equipment for organising meetings ● Certain councillors have planning skills ● Availability and initiative of the president of the rural council ● Availability of certain materials
Existence of means to disseminate information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of financial resources ● Lack of transport ● Distant villages ● Low levels of literacy ● Not everyone listens to community radio on a regular basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Existence of a community radio station ● Existence of weekly markets ● Availability of community secretary ● Existence of documented decisions
Management of financial resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local government authority funds held far away ● Ponderous decision-making procedures ● Grassroots communities not involved in monitoring management of CR resources ● Only councillors are trained in financial management ● Some councillors need more training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Actions are in accordance with the decisions taken ● Councillors are generally well-informed about the decisions taken ● Decisions are transparent
Availability of materials publicising decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hard to get access to documents recording the decisions made ● Limited range of materials for disseminating information ● Materials for disseminating information are in French, and are not translated into national languages ● Local people are not used to seeking out information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Existence of extension agents ● Several decisions have been posted ● Several decisions have been disseminated via community radio
Nature/ diversity of available resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited possibilities for generating resources at the local level ● Isolated area, with few agencies operating there ● Lack of natural resources to exploit ● Low level of rural tax recovery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support from the State and partners ● Local-level efforts to train local people on revenue generation ● Actions to protect the environment

4. From analysis to action: participatory budgeting to ensure transparency

4.1 Introduction to participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a fairly new concept in francophone Africa, and the few examples of this practice that do exist are still at the experimental phase. Most experiences of this type were inspired by initiatives in the municipality of Porto Alegre in Brazil, which began in 1989. The participatory budget is based on a process of budgetary planning, implementation and monitoring in which the various key actors debate, analyse, prioritise and monitor decisions regarding public expenditure and investments (Anonymous). Key actors include municipal or rural councillors, representatives of state structures, traditional and customary chiefs, members of civil society and community-based organisations, donors, the private sector and NGOs.⁵

The participatory budgeting process involves three types of parallel consultation: 1) neighbourhood or village assemblies, depending on the context; 2) thematic forums and 3) meetings of delegates to co-ordinate at the level of the local government authority. These different meetings are held throughout the year, giving citizens the opportunity to decide how resources will be allocated, prioritise the different social policies of the local government authority and control expenditure. By implementing programmes in this way, citizens can be involved in the process of policy formulation and implementation, stimulate reform and help allocate public resources to vulnerable groups that need them the most. It is a way of directly addressing the problem of social exclusion, insofar as political actors that have traditionally been excluded now have greater opportunities to influence decision-making processes. Thus, participatory budgeting facilitates public learning and active citizenship, bringing about social justice through more transparent policies and resource allocation, and reforming the administrative apparatus in municipalities and *communautés rurales*.⁶

5. Cofie-Agama, J. (2001) Participatory budgeting: opening decision making to society. Ministry of Finance, Accra, Ghana.

6. Wampler, Brian (2000) A Guide to Participatory Budgeting.

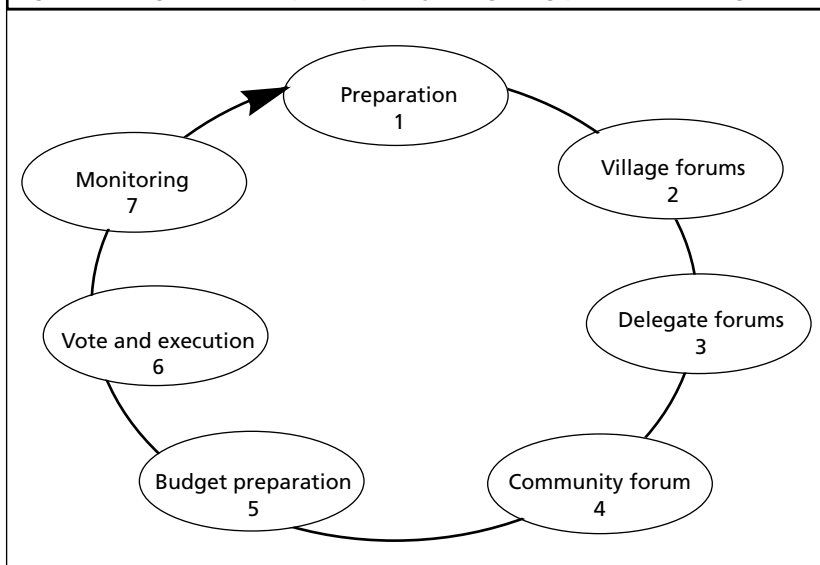
4.2 The seven stages of participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting is built around seven key stages (see Photograph 3 below).

Photo 3. Elaboration of participatory budgeting



Figure 5. Diagram of the participatory budgeting process in Ndiagianiaio



Stage 1: Preparation. This is a critical stage, when the different actors come together to determine the importance of this type of approach, define their roles and responsibilities and discuss the practical modalities for implementing the system. In our case this was the first time that any of them had been involved in participatory budgeting, so it was particularly important to focus on proper information and awareness raising to avoid any misunderstandings about their roles and responsibilities and, equally importantly, highlight the interest and potential impact of such a system. Obviously, this type of system can only function properly with the full support of the rural council.

This stage also included technical and methodological training on budgetary headings and the process of participatory budgeting. It was important to stress that the law sets out the different acts regulating budget preparation, and that it is therefore vital from the outset to create the conditions for a legal and legitimate system.

Members of the learning group organised information and awareness-raising visits to explain the new procedure for budgetary planning and its implications for the future roles and responsibilities of the different actors involved. Responsibility is the key principle of popular oversight. For elected officials, it entails the introduction of transparent mechanisms to account for the decisions taken. For local people, the right to demand accounts is matched by the responsibility to contribute to the running of different programmes. In the various villages where information sessions were held, the example of rural tax was used to illustrate how this principle of responsibility should be translated into practice. The arguments for not paying rural tax evaporate when local people are given the powers and capacities to influence the selection of future actions by the rural council, and to monitor and control the use of financial resources mobilized for this purpose.

Stage 2: Village forums to identify constraints and priorities and list existing infrastructures. The system of participatory budgetary planning was discussed in village-level forums held to identify the main constraints and proposals for action arising from the first stage of planning. These were organised so as to take account of the diverse needs of the various groups concerned, with separate forums in every village for men and women, and often young people as well, to identify the problems and actions that seemed to be a priority for the entire village community.

Because so many villages were involved, it was decided that each group of men and women should come up with a maximum of five key constraints and corresponding proposals for remedial action, making a total of 10 problems and 10 priority actions from each village. A meeting was held to share the results of the work done by the focus groups and synthesise the men's and women's proposals. At the end of this process the five most important problems and five most relevant proposals were retained through a process of collective analysis and negotiation, taking account of the separate reflections of the men and women. In the end, fears that the men's proposals would take precedence proved groundless, as most of the priority problems and actions selected had been identified by the women (see Tables 3 and 4 below). Extension agents played a key role in facilitating these discussions and ensuring that they were fair and balanced.

During these forums it was important to make it clear that this planning procedure would not necessarily result in all the actions identified being undertaken. The final choice depends on the resources available and priority actions selected at the level of the *communauté rurale* following analysis of all the village proposals. Ultimately, decisions are made on the basis of the criteria set by elected officials and village representatives. Another important activity in determining which villages will benefit from investments is the inventory of existing infrastructures, which is used to draw up a map of the infrastructures and amenities in the *communauté rurale*. The village forums also enable extension agents to evaluate the opportunities for local people to be involved in organising these actions. By the end of them, each village had proposed two delegates (a man and a woman) to participate in the next stage (the delegates' forum) and synthesise the results of the different village forums. These delegates needed to have good analytical and negotiating skills, and be sufficiently informed about the issues involved in the process to be able to explain and defend the proposals made by their respective villages.

Stage 3: Delegates' forums. Delegates selected by the various villages met to synthesise the proposals arising from the village forums. This was done in two steps. The first considered the 10 problems that seemed to be most important to the *communauté rurale* as a whole, using the matrix from the village forum to determine the frequency or duration of certain problems. The second step was to identify the 10 most commonly proposed priority actions. Here it was important to stress that the delegates' role was not to arbitrate, but to classify the proposals on the basis of statistical

analysis of the sheets produced by each village. They also needed to synthesise the information on the amenities available in each village so that it could be used to draw a map of local infrastructures. This map was prepared by a cartographer (Photo 4), and will be used as a visual tool by rural councillors and local delegates to help determine which villages will receive certain investments. It will also be an important monitoring tool.

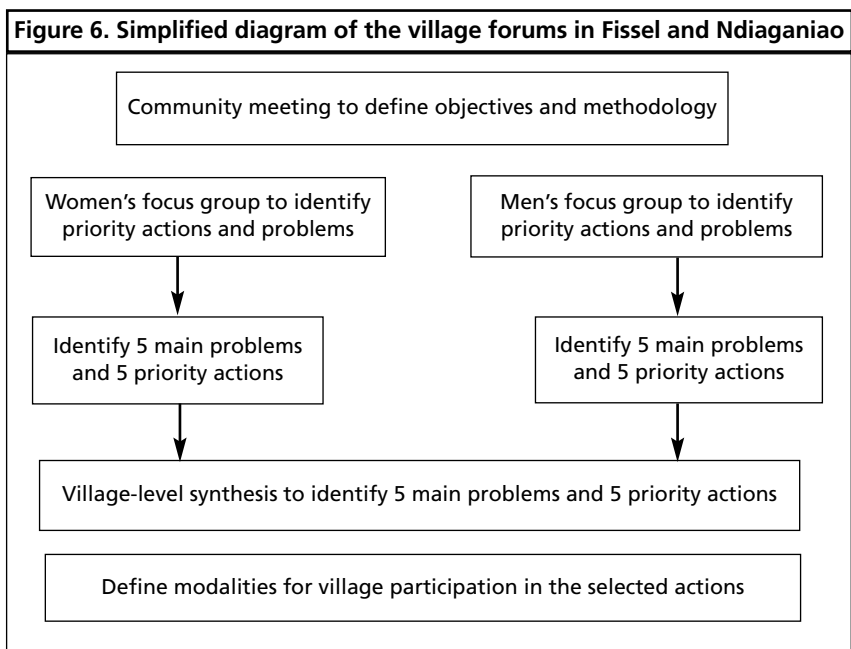


Photo 4. Map of amenities in Ndiagianiao CR



Table 3. Fissel priority problem matrix⁷

Problems	Men	Women	Total	Priority
Lack of water	22	22	44	1st
Women's heavy workload	7	14	21	2nd
Distance from health services/access to health care	8	9	17	3rd
Lack of funding	9	7	16	4th
Illiteracy	1	8	9	5th
Lack of vocational training	1	7	8	6th
Lack of seed (fertiliser)	5	2	7	7th
Lack/absence of enclosed school buildings	7	0	7	7th
Lack of enclosure around health centre	6	1	7	7th
Insufficient classes	5	1	6	10th
No village shop	5	1	6	10th

7. The figures in the columns represent the number of times a problem was cited by the groups of men and women.

Actions	1	2	3	4	Total	Ranking
Lay on water supply	17	4	2	2	25	1st
Provide a millet mill for women	2	3	3	3	11	2nd
Vocational training for women	1	2	2	3	8	3rd
Funding	1	4	1	2	8	3rd
Construct classrooms		2	3	1	6	5th
Build classrooms for younger children	1	1		4	6	5th
Enclose schools	1	3		1	5	7th
Construct village shops	2		3		5	7th
Enclose health centres		2	1	1	4	9th
Provide rooms for literacy classes		1	2	1	4	9th
Provide areas for children/young people			1	3	4	9th

Stage 4: Community forum. This brings together local delegates and elected officials, to negotiate the types of investment that will be covered by the budget being prepared. The objectives of the forum are to:

- Present the results of the community synthesis to members of the rural council;
- Enable the rural council to present the previous investment budget and anticipated income for the current year;
- Enable councillors to give a technical presentation on the budgetary vocabulary established by the State, to determine whether the proposals arising from the village forums conform with this;
- Define the criteria that will be used when selecting zones of activity;
- Choose the types of priority investments to be covered by the budget. Obviously, this choice should reflect available or anticipated resources;
- Select a small group of village delegates to act as a monitoring committee responsible for overseeing budget execution. The size of the

8. The numbers in columns 1 to 4 represent the order of priority for the action.

Photo 5. Presentation of the priority action matrix in Ndiagianiao

Actions	Priorités				Total	Rang
	1	2	3	4		
Construction d'un puits	4	3	4	2	13	1 ^{er}
Construction d'un magasin	4	4	2	4	14	2 nd
Construction de classes	3	4	4	4	15	3 rd
Construction d'un centre de santé	3	2	2	4	11	3 rd
Construction d'un centre de santé	3	3	2	2	10	4 th
Construction d'un magasin			2	6	8	5 th
Construction d'un magasin			2	4	6	6 th
Construction d'un magasin	1	4	1		6	7 th
Construction d'un magasin	4	1	1		6	7 th
Construction d'un magasin		1	1	2	4	8 th
Construction d'un magasin			1	3	4	8 th

committee should enable it to be flexible. The participatory budget monitoring committees in Fissel and Ndiagianiao have seven members, three of whom are women. They were chosen on the basis of several criteria, including: 1) analytical and facilitation skills; 2) willingness and commitment to work for the community; 3) good relations with local people; 4) ability to write in French or a local language. Other factors taken into account when selecting committee members were gender balance and geographic spread.

Stage 5: Setting the budget. The budget was set with the aid of the joint proposals formulated by councillors and village delegates during the community forum (Stage 4). The presence of the delegates at this stage helps ensure that the choice of sectors and allocation of resources reflect the way that local people rank their problems. The map of infrastructures is another important tool in setting the budget, although other significant criteria also need to be taken into account when selecting beneficiary villages. One of the objectives of setting the budget is to adopt the investment programme proposed during the community forum. This is an important stage, because it can be difficult to strike a balance, and there are real risks of sociological, political or emotional

bias. However, the principles behind participatory budgeting can help reduce such bias insofar as the council's decision is based on a proposal arising from joint analysis involving the whole community.

Stage 6: Vote and execution. This is the stage when the proposals are finally endorsed. The budget is submitted for approval by the sub-prefect, and can only be executed once such approval has been granted.

Stage 7: Monitoring and evaluation of execution. One of the main innovations in this case was the establishment of a monitoring committee composed of members of civil society. Its role is to monitor budget execution by:

- Observing the evolution of CR resources and investments. This committee should work closely with the rural council, monitoring its functioning but not becoming its subsidiary. It should also help inform and sensitise local people and, crucially, support the rural council in its efforts to identify potential new sources of revenue;
- Evaluating the tools/mechanisms put in place to disseminate information about the measures taken or to ensure that they are transparent;
- Designing materials to disseminate information to local people and organising feedback to the rural council.

Quarterly budgetary reviews have been instigated to facilitate effective budget monitoring. To do this, each monitoring committee should establish a monitoring system complete with criteria and tools, and work with the rural council on producing appropriate materials to disseminate this information and the results of these reviews to local people.

5. Challenges

The adoption of a participatory approach to budgeting by *communautés rurales* heralds a significant change in budgetary planning procedures and reinforcing local governance and popular participation. However, institutionalising this type of procedure involves a good deal more than simply applying particular tools and techniques. It also requires fundamental changes in the culture of local organisations, the attitudes and behaviour of the various local actors involved, and the practical processes of planning and decision-making. Some of the challenges that need to be addressed to achieve these changes are outlined below.

Communication and access to information. For effective popular participation and oversight at the local level, the relevant information needs to be made available and accessible to all concerned. Information and communication are central to participatory planning and budgeting processes, and as few people in rural areas have a good grasp of written French, suitable alternative materials need to be developed and distributed. The two communities of Fissel and Ndiaganiao have the added advantage of a community radio station. This can play an important role in reinforcing popular participation, and should act as a catalyst in this learning process. Implementation of the various stages of participatory budgeting also needs to be backed up with a good communication strategy to help local people appropriate this tool.

Capacity. The participatory budget is more than a periodic budgetary planning exercise. It is a continuous process of consultation between elected officials and citizens, in which the latter are regularly informed of the decisions taken by the former, and have the right and responsibility to ensure that decision-making processes take account of their opinions and recommendations. One of the pre-requisites for creating these conditions is establishing a structured, coherent and appropriate programme of capacity building. Therefore, *communautés rurales* should demonstrate their commitment and willingness to institutionalise participatory budgeting by allocating the resources required to support this approach, which can have a significant impact on the quality of local governance.

Large-scale application. Although the process under way in Fissel and Ndiaganiao is still at the pilot stage, it is clear that it will have to be adopted by most local governments if it is to be institutionalised. Taking care to avoid standardised and mechanical formulas, mechanisms for sharing and disseminating the approach need to be developed, with a focus on networking and exchanging experiences with other *communautés rurales*, establishing partnerships with programmes that support local governments by informing and training their staff in the participatory budgeting approach, disseminating the results of this process through appropriate channels, informing and involving decision makers, etc.

Engaging with political authorities. At this early stage, participatory budgeting remains an essentially local-level approach that does not directly involve the administrative authorities. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that its widespread adoption will be difficult without their political and technical support. Rural councils therefore need to develop partnerships with local deconcentrated administrative structures, while an upstream mechanism for informing policies is progressively introduced so that this type of approach can eventually be taken into account by formal planning processes. This means that practical implementation of the process in *communautés rurales* should be accompanied by awareness-raising activities for decision makers, and care taken to ensure that deputies participate in this type of learning process.

Flexibility. Introducing and consolidating a participatory approach to budgeting is a long-term process. In order to facilitate its appropriation by all actors and ensure that the initial changes introduced are not too sudden or radical, do not produce a cumbersome process that actors will be unwilling to adopt, and avoid rigid standardisation, it is vital that the learning process is flexible and can be adapted to each specific context. The key to the process is not keeping to a fixed sequence of stages, but respect for the underlying principles of participatory budgeting. These are inclusion, equity, transparency and accountability.

Institutional continuity. Safeguarding institutional memory is a major challenge for every learning process involving administrative and technical structures and local governments. The high turnover of administrative and technical staff and regular replacement of political personnel in local governments often leads to a loss of institutional knowledge, because there are no effective mechanisms in place to prevent the departure of

one or more members of the learning group interrupting or impeding the learning process. Local governments are particularly vulnerable in this respect, as major changes in the balance of political power (within the same party or between parties) may result in the whole team being changed. Given the difficulty of predicting such changes, it is important to focus on reinforcing civic awareness among the local population, which remains a constant element in the learning process regardless of the fluctuating composition of support structures and rural council offices.

‘De-politicising’ decisions. Local governments are essentially political structures whose decisions may be adversely affected by internal tensions and divisions. Although the two communities covered by this study have not been affected by this type of problem it is clearly a potential risk in several other local governments, and should therefore be taken into account when considering how the process can be institutionalised. Effective popular participation is largely dependent upon the openness and willingness of local governments to base their decisions on the needs expressed by local people, not on political considerations. Citizens certainly have an important role to play in ensuring that the structure and execution of the budget are objective and transparent, but this will obviously be easier if the bodies responsible for implementing decisions demonstrate a genuine willingness to do their job.

6. Conclusion

Although participatory budgeting is still in its early stages in the two *communautés rurales*, the benefits already discernible indicate that this procedure could have considerable potential in consolidating the decentralisation process at the local level. First, the system has proved an effective instrument for increasing popular participation by making the actions of the rural council more visible. Those concerned emphasised the fact that this experience has helped local people better understand the nature and functioning of a budget, something they had previously seen as the exclusive domain of the rural council, if not its president. Greater understanding of the budgetary process means that citizens are more motivated and better able to monitor the work done by their elected officials. Second, putting the system in place involved several capacity building activities on decentralisation and local governance, which helped councillors and local people better understand their roles and responsibilities. And third, there is absolutely no doubt that one of the important outcomes of this initiative has been to show local people that they have the capacity not only to participate, but also to directly influence how the CR prioritises its investments. Furthermore, the *communauté rurale* expects that in the years to come, this new mindset will bring about a tangible improvement in local contributions to funding for local development, through rural taxes and other forms of contribution.

However, there are a number of drawbacks to the participatory budgeting process. One is the considerable amount of time that may be required to consult with all the actors involved. This can be particularly problematic, given that the annual budget has to be drawn up within a legally determined period and timescale. Local government authorities that have adopted this approach thus find themselves torn between the need to conform to the law and the desire to allow enough time for everyone to learn from and participate in the process. Furthermore, local government authorities that do not receive external support may lack the resources needed to conduct grassroots consultations, and find it difficult to follow this type of process properly until it is institutionalised and funding made available from CR budgets.

In this particular case it was not possible to complete all seven stages of the participatory budgeting process during the first year because of the time required for some of them, especially when capacity building activities were involved. This is why the quarterly budgetary review sessions bringing together councillors and members of the monitoring committee were not held regularly, as planned. These sessions are important opportunities to reinforce the mechanisms for transparency, and one of the most powerful means for local people to monitor performance through regular reports from councillors regarding the decisions they have taken.

Although this type of mechanism takes time to install and consolidate, it has the great advantage of letting key actors, especially local people, see that there are opportunities to create forums for greater participation, and that they now have the means to seize them. However, it is important to stress that participatory budgeting requires close and regular methodological support to create the conditions for the system to be appropriated on a sustainable basis. This support entails a significant training component, both on the content of decentralisation and on the methodological process of implementing the participatory budget. In this context, particular attention should be paid to delivering quality training for members of the monitoring committee, who are central to this system.

It is to be hoped that in the near future, as participatory budgeting becomes more widespread, citizens will not merely limit themselves to identifying priorities and monitoring their implementation, but will also play an active role in allocating resources to different activities, as is now done in the municipalities where this approach is firmly institutionalised.

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ISSN 1357 9312
ISBN 1 84369 564 2