



Local governance and public goods in Niger

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Preface

This paper is one of a series of outputs from the Local Governance and Leadership research stream of the APPP, which is undertaking research in seven African countries: Malawi, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Uganda. It reports the findings of preliminary fieldwork undertaken in 2009 on the basis of which further country work is now being carried out, with final reports due in 2011. The overall aim of the research is to identify patterns of governance and leadership which are better for the provision of essential public goods at the local level than those currently prevailing in much of sub-Saharan Africa. We are particularly interested in establishing whether there are institutional patterns that are or have been better for development outcomes because they are more rooted in local societies.

The 2009 fieldwork produced an initial mapping of the key bottlenecks affecting the provision of public goods in the fields of safe birthing, water and sanitation, facilitation of enterprise and markets, and public order and security (or in some cases, a subset of these). We explored how state and other local actors are contributing to the provision of public goods and how well they are succeeding in overcoming the blockages and addressing major deficiencies. We then attempted to identify some regularities and salient features among the numerous, sometimes highly context-specific, factors influencing whether key bottlenecks in provision are successfully addressed or not. We have begun synthesising our preliminary findings in this regard, placing them in the context of what is known from other research and analysis. Another paper in the series discusses the results.

This is the first stage in a process which we expect to generate a new body of mid-range propositions, with demonstrable validity across a number of local and country cases, about the institutional causes of worse and better performance in public goods' provision in Africa.

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The provision of public goods in Niger involves in almost all cases complex forms of co-production with several actors contributing within a variety of different delivery configurations. Whether goods are actually provided, and whether the key bottlenecks in provision are able to be overcome, depends on the precise terms on which this collaboration occurs. This paper explores these issues drawing on fieldwork carried out in three urban sites in 2009 and on the authors' previous research. Focusing on public goods' provision in four particular fields, it suggests the importance of formal or informal coordination mechanisms; the important role of 'local reformers', especially in exploiting the windows of opportunity created by donor initiatives; the variety of kinds of 'informal privatisation' and de facto co-funding of public services, and the ability of corporate bodies arising from the private sector to take effective charge of some types of public goods' provision.

1 Introduction

This report provides a provisional synthesis of the results obtained by LASDEL researchers working in Niger on the delivery of four 'public goods' (safe motherhood, security, markets, and water and sanitation) in the framework of the Local Governance and Leadership stream of the Africa Power and Politics Programme. Five reports were drafted on specific topics, and these form the basis of the present synthesis. They will be appearing shortly in the series 'Etudes et Travaux du LASDEL'. Following additional research to be carried out in 2010,¹ a book is scheduled to be published which will form one of the volumes in the series on Local Powers in Niger, of which the first volume has already appeared (Olivier de Sardan and Tidjani Alou, 2009).

The principal conclusions, in regard to the *problématique* of the APPP, are set out at the end of this document. They concern the variables which may ultimately explain the

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¹ The additional studies will be concerned with the role of trade unions and other associations in the delivery of public goods, the additional funds collected to support emergency evacuations in the maternal health field, the Vulnerability Observatory, the neighbourhood hygiene and sanitation committees, the land commissions and the recall of mayors. Overall, the researchers will be focusing on the incentives of the actors who are involved in the delivery of public goods in the research sites.

quality of the delivery of public goods at the local level. The factors which seem particularly significant in this regard are:

- coordination between local actors and institutions;
- the decisive role of local reformers;
- the strategic utilisation by local actors of the inputs of Development Partners (in other words, external aid organisations);
- informal privatisation, to the extent that it results in co-financing by the state and users;
- the system of ‘contributions’;
- corporate bodies arising from the private commercial sector;
- the organisation of work and the management of human resources; and
- collective mobilisations.

2 The sites and the research

2.1 *The sites*

Three sites were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- ❑ Being the headquarters of the *commune* [district/municipality] with a corresponding presence of central-state services (as a sub-prefecture or prefecture).²
- ❑ Having different linguistic and economic make-ups. (Say is a town of Peul (Fulani) population, and Peul (Fulani) and Zarma language, on the banks of a river where people undertake fishing and mixed agro-pastoral activities. Balleyara is a town of Touareg population, but of Zarma language, dominated by market-gardening and an international market. Guidan Roudmji is a Hausa-speaking town of Gobirawa population, on the main national road and close to Nigeria, with a lot of trade and a considerable scale of agricultural production.)
- ❑ Having been the site of previous LASDEL research, such that we would start from a good fund of previous knowledge, on the historical, social and political context of the locality.

2.2 *The team*

The team which carried out this work was composed of:

² *Communes*, with an elected municipal council and mayor, were introduced for the first time across the whole country in 2004. This reform, referred to as decentralisation, was in part a response to the peace agreement which put an end to the Touareg rebellion (which demanded greater local autonomy) as well as to pressures from Development Partners (DPs).

- Four LASDEL researchers, each studying the same good at the three sites: Aïssa Diarra for safe childbirth, Younoussi Issa for water and sanitation, Aghali Abdoukader for security, and Amadou Oumarou for markets. They all had already some expertise with respect to the themes of the enquiry (Aïssa Diarra is a medical doctor and health anthropologist who works on maternal health and childbirth; Younoussi Issa is doing his thesis on rural water management and has already conducted several pieces of research on the town of Guidan Roundji; Aghali Abdoukader is doing a thesis on the first Touareg rebellion; and Amadou Oumarou, who has done a thesis on Fulani codes of decency, has already done several studies on the town of Say). Each researcher recruited a research assistant with whom to work in the field (respectively, Fati Diouldé, Mohamed Moussa, Cheybou Amadou and Amadou Boubacar).
- A doctoral student, Hassane Moussa (who is the recipient of an APPP grant), working in a cross-cutting fashion on the four goods and the *communes* in the three sites.
- Two coordinators, Mahaman Tidjani Alou and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan.

2.3 *The research*

An initial phase of collective enquiry, bringing together the whole team with two additional members of the APPP, Vikki Chambers and Fred Golooba-Mutebi, took place from 15 to 19 June 2009 at Balleyara. Then, each researcher spent a month in the field with his/her assistant (ten days per site).

The total number of interviews and detailed observations carried out by the team over the three sites is 414. The majority of the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The interviews were carried out as appropriate in French or one of the local languages of the sites (Fulfulde, Zarma, Hausa or Tamasheq).

Each good is the subject of a report by the assigned. The doctoral student also wrote a report. The present synthesis is thus based on these five reports.

3 Some concepts arising from the fieldwork

The research suggests that all the ‘public goods’ selected (water and sanitation, security, markets and safe motherhood) correspond to real shared preoccupations among the local populations, who have high expectations and consider that the state and political authorities have responsibilities in these matters (and thus deplore their shortcomings and weaknesses).

The provided goods which we have investigated all have the particular character of being perceived by everybody as indispensable for everybody; they correspond in other words to a widely shared sense of the *general interest*. That these goods are of general interest (or of public interest) is of course not specific to the particular local areas we

have been researching; elsewhere, too, access to drinkable water, the struggle against insecurity, well functioning markets and the possibility of giving birth without dying, seem to be shared ‘demands’ or aspirations, latent or manifest, of the users/citizens. But the conditions under which these goods are delivered are largely local (even if they involve non-local actors: the state, private firms, development agencies etc.), because it is locally that one drinks, one is protected, one sells one’s animals or one is brought into the world.

These public goods (or goods of general interest) have an emic significance: every inhabitant of our sites can grasp easily what is being referred to, *grosso modo*, and they can be translated without great difficulties into the local languages. In Zarma, one would say *han kan ga borey kul nafa*, ‘what benefits everybody’, or *bor kul wone*, ‘what belongs to everybody’. In Hausa, it would be *mai ma kowa anfani* or *na kowa*. More concretely, in Zarma one would say for example *koyra kul deyo* (‘the wells for all’).

Having access to these goods is for every single person a challenge, one that expresses itself first of all at the individual level (opportunistic behaviour or ‘free riding’), but also gives rise to forms of collective organisation, because the necessary conditions for delivery clearly go beyond the scale of the individual. One can therefore speak of a collective challenge.

3.1 Basic components

So far, our four goods remain largely abstract. When one stops focusing on their generic definition and begins to consider their concrete delivery, one sees that they are in fact aggregates of various components, each of which poses specific delivery problems. The respective components are not infinite in number but their diversity requires that we distinguish them carefully, because the challenges, the infrastructural requirements and the actors involved vary from one component to the other.

For example, water has various uses (drinking, washing, irrigation) and one obtains it with different sorts of infrastructure (traditional wells, cemented wells, normal bore-holes, artesian bore-holes, irrigation networks) and in various ways, directly (ropes, hand pumps, taps) or indirectly (*garwa* water carriers, sellers of plastic bags of *piyu wata* or *hari yeyni*). The difficulties encountered and the management modalities are very different depending on these parameters, and the actors themselves are well aware of this: the components of each good have an emic existence which is sometimes more distinct than that of the good itself. Let us take the case of cemented wells: the distinction between ‘government wells’ (*gomnenti deyey*, drilled by the state’s OFEDES) and the ‘project wells’ (*porze deyey*), drilled by development projects, are about differences of quality, but they also refer to distinct modes of governance.

In the same way, if one turns to the variable ‘security’, various components become apparent: land conflicts are not of the same nature and do not call for the same

procedures as theft of livestock, which in turn differs from attacks on lorries, which again is not the same thing as urban delinquency. And to get even more into the detail of the research, in the category of land conflicts one needs not to mix up conflicts among agriculturalists with those in which cultivators are in conflict with herders (much more frequent and more intense). Furthermore, in at least one site (Balleyara), it is necessary to make the further distinction between conflicts which pit local herders against local agriculturalists, and those which involve transhumant Oudah Fulani sheep-herders, who are viewed locally as a public calamity.

As for markets, this term covers a number of quite distinct types of space, governed by very different rules of the game (official norms and practical norms): everyday small markets serving local exchanges and meeting immediate household needs; the big weekly markets of regional or international significance, which are divided in turn into shops and stalls on the one hand (with distinctions between wholesalers, retailers and hawkers, with different spaces for different products), and the cattle markets on the other (much more complex and organised), not to mention the trucking stations or abattoirs.

The aggregate character of the goods being considered must therefore not mask the fact that *it is at the level of the components of each good that the problems of collective action are posed concretely, with the effect that different solutions may be needed in each case.* We shall see in this way that the management of the bus station of Balleyara by a corporate private body seems to work in a satisfactory way, which does not apply to other components of ‘market’.

3.2 *Delivery configurations*

Giorgio Blundo rightly underlined that the concept of mode of local governance (Olivier de Sardan, 2009) does not allow us to capture the variety of the actors and forms of delivery entailed by any given good, and that it makes sense to take the goods delivered as the point of departure of the research, rather than the modes of local governance (Workshop Report, 2009). This is anyway the research strategy that we have adopted, with each researcher focusing on a particular good. The strategy proved fruitful, in part because each good (or, more exactly, the principal components of each good) does indeed seem to depend on the efforts of a plurality of actors and institutions. The delivery of these goods entails complex forms of coordination among modes of local governance, in other words between various segments of the different authorities and agencies which have some sort of presence locally, each with their specific mandates and ways of working.

We shall call the diverse combinations of actors, institutions and means which permit the delivery of a good its *delivery configuration*. Each component of a good has a specific delivery configuration, but putting the matter in a general way we can say that the delivery configuration of a good is the totality of actors and institutions, and of

equipment and resources, which contribute to the delivery of its various components, under some form or other of co-production: collaboration (direct or indirect, episodic or permanent), substitution, competition, complementarity, etc.

If the particular delivery configuration of the component 'evacuation of patient in case of obstructed pregnancy' includes as essential actors the midwife or nurse, people who are able to pay for the transport (kin, mayor, chief), the ambulance driver, elements of the FNIS (National Security Corps), and a functioning operating theatre and blood supplies at the referral centre (and also assumes the availability of the ambulance, the means of obtaining it and paying for its use), the general configuration for the delivery of babies involves in addition traditional birth attendants and trained TBAs [*matrones*], the mayor's office, the President's Special Programme, various projects supporting maternal health, and even the chieftdom (as well as a staffed and equipped health unit, and maintenance procedures for the ambulance).

None of this implies abandoning the concept of *mode of local governance*, however. Rather it is a matter of relegating it to a secondary plane and reformulating it, in particular to allow it to express better both of two dimensions: that of power and legitimacy on the one hand, and that of the delivery of goods of general interest on the other.

3.3 *Critical bottlenecks (noeuds stratégiques)*

We have noted for each good, at the level of its basic components, the existence of certain critical stages or places which either favour or, on the contrary, block the delivery of this good, and may constitute bottlenecks (or, in contrast, positive entry points) for more satisfactory provision. The absence or presence of a competent agent or an indispensable resource, and the taking of an appropriate decision or otherwise, have therefore important consequences.

Thus, for safe childbirth three bottlenecks stand out, all three linked to the case of obstructed pregnancies: (1) in the case of delivery which starts at home, the rapidity of the evacuation to a health unit; (2) then the rapidity of the evacuation from the health unit to a functional operating theatre; (3) the existence of a functional operating theatre at the level of the district hospital, with qualified staff who are available, and blood.

For security, we shall see that: (1) the availability of means of transport and a fuel allowance seems a bottleneck for operations off-base; (2) the implementation of special measures during the transhumance of the Oudah Peuls (Balleyara) is another; (3) regular patrols and a local presence seem to a bottleneck in the urban milieu.

For the markets, the critical bottlenecks seem to be: (1) cleanliness and sanitation; (2) security; and (3) collection and management of taxes. Thus, two of the nodes refer to other general-interest goods studied during the research.

Finally, for water and sanitation, the list will include: (1) the biological quality of the available drinking water; and (2) the disposal of household waste.

The case of water and sanitation illustrates the fact that social awareness of a critical bottleneck can be quite variable. Everyone is more or less conscious that the disposal of household waste is not being handled satisfactorily, and that this is a problem. Regarding the biological quality of water, the situation is different: this is a problem only for a fraction of the population (those who are educated or sensitised on sanitation matters), for public health officers and for the experts. For the majority of the population, it is the taste of the water that is the criterion of quality.

Quite clearly, various delivery configurations can contribute particular solutions to address these bottlenecks, in more or less optimal ways. For example for node (1) of safe motherhood (rapidity of the evacuation to a health unit), one can try to impose an obligation not to deliver at home but do so directly in a health unit, an obligation enforced if necessary with recourse to the security forces, the mayor's office or the chieftom. One might alternatively accept home births, but with midwives trained to detect ectopic pregnancies and a rapid evacuation service providing transport by cart to a health unit (or, another variant, promote the calling of a health worker to the home in the case of problems and requiring the ambulance to come directly to where the expectant mother is).

However, we do not aim in this report to imagine a whole possible range of solutions, and even less to decree which ones are the best. We aim rather to describe the real configurations that we have found and how their actors have confronted and dealt with the actual critical nodes.

3.4 Particular accountabilities

The question of accountabilities was one of the guiding threads of the research. This turned out to be difficult to handle, and would need to be better defined with attention to the particular types of accountability that are applicable in each mode of governance and making a distinction between formal accountability and informal accountability.

1) The general concept of accountability is difficult to express for our interlocutors, and does not figure in the usual emic registers, in French, Hausa, Zarma or Peul. If one searches out what can nevertheless be expressed in terms of local concepts, these terms evoke rather general themes around obligations concerning sociability, reciprocity, returning favours, debt and moral obligation, which widen considerably the concept of accountability. It may be that the main risk with the concept of accountability lies in its fuzziness and polysemy. We need, in fact, to distinguish between accountability in the broad sense (which is a catch-all, covering hierarchical relationships, activity relationships, patron-client relations, social obligations and reputation) and 'particular

accountabilities', a more interesting concept because it is more discriminating. Thus, Staffan Lindberg (2009) distinguishes twelve different sorts of accountability, which are non-commensurable with each other.

2) If one considers for example the representational form of accountability, it becomes apparent that several modes of local governance operate completely outside the scope of this form of accountability. Examples would include chiefdom (which, not being representative, has none of the corresponding obligations to render accounts to the population) or the local state (whose staffs, not being providers of services, have no obligation to account to users).

In contrast, two modes of local governance function with a built-in representative accountability: the associational mode and the communal [district council] mode. The management committees are expected to be accountable to the populations they represent (but in many cases the general assemblies do not take place). The commune council is supposed to be accountable to the voters, while the mayor is accountable to the council. It is at this level that a deepening of representative accountability would be interesting; the role of the political parties and various forms of patronage will no doubt be part of the picture.

3) But there are other particular accountabilities that can be studied. For example, the local services of the state are subject to a bureaucratic accountability. This, which belongs to the realm of official norms, is very often reduced to the reports which the official must supply to his managers. Certain forms of results assessment (coming out of the New Public Management) have been introduced here and there in Niger at the initiative and with the support of external partners, but their real impact remains to be established. Indeed, frequently the real accountability is very distant from the formal accountability, and it would be interesting to explore the variations and forms of this discrepancy in different services, and which types of practical norms of accountability are at work (cf. the APPP research stream on State Bureaucracies).

4) In this way, the delivery configurations all imply combinations of actors and modes of governance governed by different particular accountabilities: in the absence of formal frameworks situated at some superior level, the very heterogeneity and instability of these combinations places them outside any common accountability. This is an important implication of our studies: the actors and institutions which contribute to the co-delivery of a service are subject to non-commensurable particular accountabilities. The official is bureaucratically accountable to his head of service; the mayor is representationally accountable to his commune council and his electors; the chief is reputationally accountable to his peers and to his family (that is, to his subjects); the local NGO is financially accountable to the international NGO which sponsors it, and so on.

5) But, apart from these various formal, official, accountabilities, there is no doubt that one might establish for each one some informal, *de facto*, accountabilities arising from what we have called practical norms (Olivier de Sardan, 2008). If the mayor is representatively accountable to his municipal council, he is also accountable in a practical sense to the businessmen who have financed his election campaign. If the official is bureaucratically accountable to his head of service, he is also practically accountable to his political ‘patrons’ who have got him his position.

6) Certainly, the citizens/users make judgements about the quality of the services provided, make demands, express their expectations and sometimes mobilise around them. These popular assessments, to which we have paid some attention, need to be studied in more depth, including in relation to the reactions they elicit or not from the authorities and political elites. May one expect that above and beyond these particular accountabilities corresponding to each institution, we shall witness the emergence of a sense of generalised accountability towards users, at a practical level and perhaps one day at the official level, based on a form of shared civic consciousness? It is the principal advantage of the communes that they are the only official institutional site where such an accountability towards the users might coincide in law and in fact with a form of particular accountability, namely representational accountability.

4 A comparative overview of the four goods

Rather than describe each good separately, we shall put the four goods in perspective from two points of view: their historical dynamics and their delivery configurations. But first we need to recall some of the main features of the historical context in Niger.

4.1 A periodisation of the historical context

We may begin by recalling that it was with the colonial state that the modern state came to Niger, and that the form of public goods delivery it adopted was a particularly despotic one. The grain reserves are an illustration of a policy designed to deliver a fundamental public good, food security, which was carried out in such a bureaucratic and repressive way that it evoked the general hostility of the population! (Olivier de Sardan, 1984). It was also the colonial state that created the administrative chiefdom (canton chiefs, group chiefs, tribal chiefs, village chiefs), which was the monopolistic form of local public authority in the colonial period (and in some respects up to decentralisation in 2004) and the interface between the colonial administration and the people.

At independence, the single party, the RDA, ruled the country in a way that continued to be autocratic and very ‘state-centric’, with party committees at all levels as its foundation. The military regime of Kountché which followed produced an upsurge of concern for discipline, at the same time creating a mass youth organisation, the *samaria*, as a form of local mobilisation and collective action (but under strong central control).

With the National Conference in 1991, the country entered a democratic phase which was a somewhat turbulent (affected by institutional crises and coups d'état) but marked by a number of new factors: structural adjustment, begun just a little earlier; years of unpaid salaries; the rolling back of the state from certain of its service functions and areas of authority; the coming of multi-partyism and electoral patronage (with three large parties based on shifting alliances exercising a strong influence over 20 years and succeeding each other in power); the generalisation of corruption; a real freedom of expression and the press (despite a few hitches); a greater and greater dependence on external aid, and the more and more visible presence of projects and NGOs in the local landscape. The two main characteristics of this period were the conversion of the political and state elite to unbridled forms of competitive political patronage, fuelled by growing business involvement and the hegemony of big traders; and the increased dependence on aid.

The assimilation of democracy to a state of 'anarchy', where indiscipline, corruption and division prevail, is a frequent theme. It certainly captures something of the truth, but also a certain nostalgic idealisation of the past under the military dictatorship. The fact that public services functioned better in that era is also due to a number of co-factors (and thus not only to the vertical, authoritarian and repressive character of public management under Kountché): the 'boom' in uranium revenues which took place in that period; a much smaller population, and services delivered to a much smaller percentage of it; a more limited and less complex bureaucracy; growing indebtedness and external assistance that was more flexible than it became under structural adjustment., and so on.

In 2004, 256 communes were created, with for the first time elected councils and mayors.

4.2 Historical dynamics of the four goods³

Two types of case are found: for certain goods, there has been a progressive transformation of the delivery conditions since the pre-colonial era; for other goods, there is a rupture between the old conditions of delivery and those that apply today.

Goods provided since the pre-colonial period and progressively transformed

This is the case of markets and water. These two goods already played an important role in the 19th century. The creation of markets implied a strong investment of local political authority, the existence of a system of political alliances and recourse to many ritual practices. The creation of a market always called for (and still calls for, although today more discreetly) ritual practices involving the collectivity. The density of markets was then still low, and they depended on the caravan traffic and the exchanges involved

³ The historical data are derived from our previous studies and the literature on Niger.

commodities that were very different from those of our times (slaves, salt, cotton fabric). After colonisation, markets little by little multiplied, under the supervision of administrative chiefs but with strict control by the colonial authorities (who issued the authorisations). The contexts and modalities of the markets thus became progressively quite different from those of the pre-colonial period. Today, they are officially under the mayors' offices.

The type of evolution also affected water. Wells were central to the pre-colonial peopling of the country, serving to mark the rights of the first inhabitants. The wells called 'traditional' (of earth) still exist today, but mainly in private courtyards or gardens, and they have been little by little replaced as collective neighbourhood or village wells by cemented wells, which began under the colonial regime but have expanded greatly since independence, with an office of the state in charge of sinking wells (OFEDDES) which was present across the whole country. These days, following structural adjustment and the dismantling of state offices and state-owned enterprises, the sinking of wells is primarily the affair of development projects, and drilling for hand pumps and small-scale water distribution systems is increasingly common.

Goods delivered since the pre-colonial period but which are now delivered in a radically new way

Security was a major preoccupation in the 19th century but in the context of wars and feuds, as well as the absence of a state and fluctuating political alliances. Today and since the colonial era, security has become the official monopoly of the state, delivered in a context of peace, and it has to confront conflict in the countryside (in particular, the sharpening competition for space between herders and cultivators, which was formerly unknown) and delinquency: banditry, burglary and theft. Modern security is today perceived as having been effectively provided under the colonial regime, then under the single party and under the military dictatorship, but as having degenerated since the coming of democracy.

As for sanitation, the problems dealt with by the pre-colonial hamlets (occasional cleaning-up of public roads are hardly comparable with the scale of the challenges now observed in our sites (excreta, disposal of household waste, discharges, channelling of used water and rain-water), which, the reports testify, are getting little attention despite strong popular dissatisfaction about the 'dirtiness' of the public places. But, in between, the periods of the single party and the military dictatorship continue to be perceived as representing a sort of equilibrium situation, in which the problems were not too great, and where solutions based on collective discipline (still effective at that time) were adequate to the task.

'Safe' motherhood (the avoidance of maternal and infantile deaths), finally, also falls into this category. This may seem surprising, for two reasons: on the one hand, a happy outcome to a pregnancy is surely a permanent and ancestral concern; and on the other

hand, the conditions in which many women give birth today (at home, in squatting position, with the eventual help of a traditional birth attendant) are little different from the past. But childbirth ‘of the traditional type’, outside any sort of medical context, was the very opposite of safe motherhood: the title of a LASDEL study, ‘Childbirth is War’ (Olivier de Sardan, Moumouni and Souley, 2001), conveys well how much remains of that era when childbirth was highly risky. The risks are still high: the rate of maternal mortality in Niger is the highest in the world.

In fact risk-free maternity has only been available recently. It requires very precise technical conditions, essentially the possibility of doing a caesarean section in time in the case of an obstructed pregnancy. In the colonial era and the first part of the independence period, this was not available in most the rural sector, and childbirth continued to be practised at home under conditions where the only recourse in case of complications was, as before, calling a *marabout* for prayers or a priest from a possession cult to carry out sacrifices. Sometimes it still happens that way.

For these reasons, safe motherhood, in the form of a modern good made available by medicine, is only perceived by a part of the population, whereas another part still believes more or less that only magico-religious practices can prevent deaths, which, if they happen, are the expression of fate.

Divergent assessments

As regards criteria of evaluation, the position of safe childbirth is very different from that of the other goods. While all the goods that we have selected are the subject of a wide consensus as regards the generality of their interest, there can be very different appreciations in regard to the effectiveness and quality with which they are actually delivered depending on whether one takes an expert assessment or a popular one.

In the case of markets, security and sanitation, the popular evaluations and the expert evaluations are found to coincide not entirely but at least quite considerably. In fact any user can have an opinion based on personal experience (as well as on local public opinion) about the cleanliness or otherwise of the town, on the success and functioning of a market, or about the recrudescence of burglaries or the struggle against highway robbers. There are few reasons to expect major disagreements with what expert evaluations would say (save that more precise enquiries based on figures: this is indeed the weak point of our enquiries).

For safe motherhood, there is a significant divergence between popular and expert assessments, depending on which basic components one is considering. ‘Normal’ childbirth at home is preferred by many women, and not only because the possibility of risk-free pregnancy is not well understood (in the case of obstructed pregnancy) but because of bad conditions under which they are received in health centres and the family support that they can count on at home.

In the case of water, there is also one component, the quality of the water, about which there are discrepant assessments. As mentioned above, taste criteria are emphasised by users, and they can be very different or opposed to the bacteriological criteria used in laboratory analysis (the river water, which is preferred by many users is a carrier of germs in the view of health professionals).

The process of globalisation and its effects

The studied goods are connected in different ways to the outside world, the ‘global economy’ and international expertise. While the markets are linked by their products to China, Dubai or Europe, their modes of organisation are in contrast strongly and engage little with the outside. In contrast, water and sanitation, which figure among the MDGs, involve these days techniques and procedures which are standardised at world level. The same is true of safe motherhood, which follows schemas promoted by the WHO in all countries of the South. Finally, security is a highly national affair (in regard to the official monopoly at least) even if the ‘war on terror’ has begun to introduce international coordination and standardisation.

4.3 The delivery configurations

Delivery configurations are rather numerous and complex, and hence pose coordination problems. Rather than considering collective action problems in an abstract and formal way, the research allows us to analyse them in definite contexts, where the constraints are specific: what coordination between which actors is necessary for the provision of which goods (with what components) and at what level of quality?

In this way we can appreciate that, sometimes, the coordination is achieved in a formal framework, but that quite often it remains informal. It can also be bilateral or multilateral, episodic or regular, joined-up or in stages.

A first observation stands out: there is no clear global framework overarching the various forms of local co-delivery (no higher instance of coordination, so to speak, no ‘constitutional’ institution).

It is possible to distinguish three quite distinct families of configurations, in which the collective action problems are posed in different ways. There are configurations in which co-delivery is organised in order to mitigate the weaknesses of an officially monopolistic institution. Other configurations are polycentric from the outset. Finally, one observes some formal coordination frameworks, but with limited competences.

Compensating for the weaknesses in officially monopolistic configurations

This is the case of security and health (safe motherhood being from this point of view so bound up with the health system that it is difficult to isolate it).

The security forces and the public health system are the two central forms of the presence of the state in the rural milieu (one might add education to this). They involve strongly hierarchical professional bodies. Their structures cover the whole of the national territory. Their hegemony and legitimacy in their respective spheres are not publicly contested by anyone. They have a quasi-monopoly at least officially in the delivery of these goods, even if, of course, popular local informal forms of provision have always existed alongside the state system (e.g. healers).

However, quite often the state services are not in a position to deliver their goods in a satisfying fashion. Their lack of resources is obviously a major cause of this. In view of these shortcomings, it is only the mobilisation of other actors and institutions that is able to 'save' the users to some degree. In other words, the complex configurations that one finds for these two goods are in a certain sense 'rescue' or 'recovery' configurations.

It is in the security sector that the informal collaboration is most surprising (given the official monopoly of the state in this domain, and the heritages of the colonial and military regimes). The 'de-monopolisation of security' (Aghali) is now quite established.

These palliative solutions can take several forms.

Coordination of action between institutions

Faced with the insufficiencies of the forces of order or the health system, the intervention of other actors in coordination with the state services becomes indispensable.

The most obvious example is the off-base patrols of the gendarmerie in response to land conflicts, which take place with their vehicle and the participation of the FNIS (no vehicle) and some of the 'horsemen' of the chief, while the fuel is paid for by contributions from the population collected by the village chiefs and by a donation from the mayor's office. For maternal health, the evacuations are only possible thanks to an ambulance provided by the Special Programme of the President of the Republic, but this involves a nurse, a member of the FNIS, fuel and ancillary costs, which are paid for either by a tax imposed on the users of the health centre, or by the family of the expectant mother, by an insurance scheme or the mayor's office.

The creation of associational structures

These are born out of the need to compensate for the 'gaps' in state service provision, while grafting themselves onto the same public-interest mission and laying claims to it.

Thus one has, in the field of security youth militias called *yambanga*, and in the health field the so-called ‘improved’ *tontines* [savings and loan circles] and mutual health insurance schemes for dealing with ‘catastrophic’ events such as evacuations. Some of these are informal (the militias and tontines), and others are formal (health insurance). It is worth noting that these associational formations work with local resources (donations or deductions for the *yambanga*, contributions for the tontines and insurance schemes).

Ways of ‘getting by’ at the individual level

In general, this entails either the direct payment by the user for the good delivered in a private fashion (a trader recruits a private guard, an expectant mother rewards a traditional birth attendant) or some sort of ‘arrangement’ between the user and the state agent, in other words a form of informal privatisation of the provision (a trader pays the FNIS to escort his lorry; an expectant woman pays the midwife to take good care of her).

Polycentric configurations

For the three other goods, there is no official provider.⁴ They are in a sort of ‘no man’s land’. The delivery configurations are from the beginning multiple, ‘splintered’. Here too one finds different forms.

Institutions acting in parallel

Rather than coordinating, the institutions intervene in this case separately, each with its own programme, and undertaking its own actions. The coordination across institutions is weak, even absent. For example, when it comes to wells each project does its own drilling using its own criteria. The markets are divided into distinct spaces (central market, livestock market, bus terminal, abattoir) each of which has its own modes of organisation.

Creation of associational structures

In contrast with the ‘palliative’ associations, here it is a matter of associations largely promoted by projects and DPs which are active in sectors where the state is absent. These associations generally take the form of ‘committees’ linked to infrastructure or programmes financed by donor funds: management committees for livestock markets, neighbourhood committees for sanitation. The balance-sheet of these committees tends to be negative: they end up being dissolved or falling asleep.

Delivery networks

The delivery of the selected goods rests also on chains of actors who intervene in successive steps in the operation, as if in a kind of relay. This is the case of the traders,

⁴ Sometimes, a good may have been delivered in the past according to an officially monopolistic configuration which has now disappeared (for example the state monopoly after independence in the sinking of cemented wells, OFEDES).

who get their provisions through supply networks including wholesalers and intermediaries, and also of the free drinking water network constructed around an artesian well in Balleyara, whose maintenance and new extensions imply successive, blow by blow interventions by the sub-Prefect, the commune, traders and artisan plumbers.

Ways of 'getting by' at the individual level

This assumes the same forms as with the goods delivered in officially monopolistic ways.

Institutionalised coordination frameworks

Nevertheless, in various particular domains at the level of the components of certain goods, one does observe the existence of institutional coordination frameworks, which could be considered successful innovations.

The Land Commissions (COFOs)

These are official bodies, dependent on the Permanent Secretariat of the *Code Rural* and intended to have a presence throughout the country. What is innovative about them is that they bring together, at all levels (region, department, commune, village), all the actors and stakeholders concerned with land issues in such a way as to prevent conflicts (which makes them a potentially important element in the security picture), agree common norms, stabilise land tenure and identify those with legitimate claims [*ayant-droits*]. So one finds there chiefdoms, mayor's offices, state services, NGOs involved in the sector, herders' associations, etc. These are structures put in place by the state (but broadly supported by the Development Partners) and involving officials paid by the state. At the village level, few commissions (COFOBs) are operational; they are on the other hand in place in the regions, the departments (COFODEP) and the majority of communes (COFOCOM). At the same time, this original and ambitious formula seems to have real impacts only when two conditions are satisfied: (a) the presence of a permanent (paid) secretary who is competent and; (b) the support of a local project providing operational inputs (logistics, transport etc.). This is the reason the COFODEP of Guidan Roumji seems to work well.

The Health Management Committees (COGES) and Health Committees (COSA)

In the context of cost-recovery (Bamako Initiative) all health units have management committees. They are composed of representatives of the population (the chair and treasurer and the two important roles, sitting alongside the nursing officer in charge, who acts as secretary), and they oversee the management of the fee income, the local recruitment and payment of a manager (and often a handy-man or guard) and the purchase of medicines. The personality of the committee chair is an important factor. Whatever the difficulties of these committees (lack of member motivation, contested representativeness, and short-circuiting by the health personnel), they have permitted a broadly satisfactory functioning of the cost-recovery system and the provision of

medicines, providing a real ‘voice’ to users and a way in which local notables have a right of oversight over the health units. The system has a pyramid structure: at the level of the Health District, then the Health Region, there are health committees with representatives of the population.

In contrast with the Land Commissions, which are not operational everywhere, the Health Management Committees and Health Committees operate routinely throughout the country. They are based solely on internal resources generated by cost recovery, without injections from development projects (except for occasional donations of medicines). But the current policy of exempting children under five from payment paradoxically threatens the equilibrium of the system (topic of a study under way at LASDEL; Olivier de Sardan et al., 2010).

Subject to confirmation by further research, the Health Committees at regional level have been the ones who have sometimes taken the decision to finance the costs of evacuations (fuel and personnel costs) by taking ‘a few additional pennies’ from all the users of health centres (in other words, a tax, including on those patients exempted from fees under the policy of free care).

Observatory for vulnerability monitoring

At the initiative of and with financing from the European Union, the Early Warning System (SAP) convenes at departmental level monthly meetings of all the technical services at which they pool information and data on vulnerability and commission pilot studies. They have taken place in Say and in Guidan Roundji, but irregularly. These meetings are included in the activities of the sub-regional committee of the Early Warning System (CSRPGCA), of which the departmental Director of Agriculture is the focal point. Certain communes which serve as ‘sentinel sites’ (like Balleyara) are also, with support from, CARE (APCAN project), are equipped similarly if they include a minimum number of villages classed as ‘vulnerable’. This is a rare case of coordination at local level across government services and between NGOs and projects (although it builds on coordination of the same type which took place at the time of the food crisis in 2005 to deal with the distribution of relief in the framework of sub-regional committees). One may ask whether these committees are really dealing with the goods with which we have been concerned in this research (an issue to be followed up).

Steering committees of the Special Programme

Because this programme is highly opaque and very centralised, it is not clear that the committees which are to be set up at the departmental level to select the activities to be financed, under the authority of the Prefect, are really operational (see below).⁵

⁵ Since the coup d’état of February 2010, this programme has been closed.

Community-based management committees

Here we are not dealing with local initiatives but with institutional engineering introduced by projects and then picked up by the municipalities.

As often the case in Niger, it was due to DP initiative that community-based management committees were established by the mayors' offices to try to deal with the difficult problem of the disposal of household waste, as in Guidan Roudji with the support of SNV. This was initially successful: the garbage truckers, recruited with the help of the neighbourhood chiefs, were paid regularly thanks to the contributions of 50 CFA Fr per household. But for various reasons (including a conflict between the mayor and his opposition concerning the remuneration of public cleaning days) the family heads began little by little to refuse to pay the contributions, and the truckers, not having been paid, refused to continue to work and started making private use of the carts. An almost identical scenario took place in Say, where the mayor's office has proven little by little to be incapable of paying the truckers it had recruited.

One could also speak of the collapse of the market management committees that were established in Balleyara and Guidan by the municipalities (two series of committees were removed and replaced in these two sites!) and the market monitoring committee in Say. The aim was different in this case: it was to exercise control over the tax collectors (nominated by the mayors' offices on political criteria) who were suspected of diverting part of the revenue. But these committees quickly became in their turn the object of accusations of misappropriation.

5 Principal features of the local provision of the four general-interest goods (the modes of local governance)

5.1 The real presence of the state, its weaknesses and its paradoxes

The state is present everywhere. The 'external signs' of the state are numerous, but this presence is in fact not very effective, with the agents often demobilised, frustrated and de-motivated. The state remains in spite of everything a central actor in regard to health and security, but it figures much less in water and markets.

A real territorial network [maillage]

The presence of the state is manifested, first of all, by its official representatives, the Governors, Prefects and sub-Prefects, who have authority over all the deconcentrated public services (and also have oversight of the communes) and whose presence is recognisable in public buildings with their flags and large courtyards in the image of the residences of the old 'commanders' of the colonial regime.

As we have said above, health and security (and one might add education, although we are not concerned with that) are the sectors where the presence of the state in the rural

landscape is most strong, visible and dense. Health is without doubt the public service that is best organised, best structured, most embedded and most functional. The forces of order (gendarmerie and FNIS) also cover the whole territory. Contrary to widespread ideas about 'the retreat of the state', these professional bodies are expanding. Others, in contrast, are declining or are seeing their functions transformed, like the water technicians.

But the 'real' operation of these services, far from meeting their declared objectives and satisfying users' expectations, is often criticised by the latter.

Serious under-provision of materials and operational resources

The poverty of the state services is spectacular (cf. above on the monopolistic configurations). Certainly, all the services are represented in the prefectures and the communes, not only on paper but in terms of staff establishments, but they do not have quarters worthy of the name, and they lack materials, means of operating and means of transport. For water, there is no commune-level service, and the departmental services are limited to a single agent who has no vehicle and no office. The forces of order do not have the fuel allocation that they require to perform their mission, the gendarmerie car is broken down in Guidan, in a very bad condition in Say, the FNIS have no vehicle over the three sites, one motor-bike in Guidan, two in Say, and none in Balleyara. The operating budget of the community development service in Balleyara is 60.000 CFA Fr per year (less than 100 Euros) and this is not always disbursed.

Only the health services seem to at least function, well or badly, at the lowest level (with nursing officers), thanks to cost recovery. In fact, payment for medical services does permit the provision of generic medications, although this system is threatened by the new policy of free service. However, serious operational problems persist in the referral chain, like the absence of blood supplies in district hospitals. As for equipment, situations vary greatly from one health unit to another, particularly at the level of district hospitals, and also according to whether there is a DP active in the field or not.

Human resource problems

In such a state of deprivation, the state agents who are present in the sites but lacking means of working are often discouraged. In technical services like water, hygiene and sanitation, community development, livestock and agriculture, there is in general just one agent, isolated and out of practice [*désœuvré*], occasionally two (most often a national service conscript).

In contrast, the health personnel are more numerous, especially the auxiliaries (clinical or outreach assistants, trained TBAs, community health workers and managers). But for them there are two problems. On the one hand, the hierarchy of the health service has great difficulty in managing postings in a coherent way. The more distant CSIs (base-

level health units), even if they serve many clients, have only one nursing officer, whereas in important centres there is sometimes a plethora of personnel. Reform-minded doctors seldom remain for long in one place. As for the midwives, they pose a problem that is well known in health circles. They refuse to be posted to rural area or, if they live in one, they refuse to be moved, 'pulling strings' in various quarters to get their way. The influence they mobilise may be local, as in the case of the immovable midwife in Guidan Roudji (known as the 'queen mother'), protected by her brother, the canton chief. But the interventions can also come from highly placed officials in the national political or administrative system who are the spouses or relatives of the midwives (Jaffré and Prual, 1993).

In addition, the behaviour of the health personnel presents numerous problems. It is severely criticised by service users, who refer to absenteeism, abusive treatment and rackets. One recalls the refusal of the midwife of Balleyara to comply with the duty roster, or the one in Guidan Roudji to undertake PTME (Prevention of Mother-to-Child HIV Transmission) activities, along with the observation that numerous community health workers abandon their health duties.

Creative improvisation and informal privatisation

But non-respect for official norms and procedures can also be the effect of a desire to do better at delivering the expected services. Thus, one observes that the mayor can, by paying for the fuel, mobilise a patrol by the forces of order without going through the Prefect. A village chief can ask a nurse to treat a patient on credit, under his guarantee. An ambulance can evacuate a pregnant woman directly to Niamey or Maradi instead of passing through the district hospital as required by the regulations. Traders may be permitted to declare themselves mere 'hawkers' in order to be able to make use of socially subsidised water sources.

The most positive examples of this are the various improvisations used by the anaesthetist and surgeon's assistant in Guidan Roudji, who, very much contrary to the official rules, in view of the frequent absence of the doctor (and also when he is present!) undertakes basic surgical interventions (including caesareans) at the district hospital. The personal factor appears to be an important element.

These various ways of 'getting by' are also more and more taking on a monetarised form, which may allow one to speak of an 'informal privatisation' of services, in the sense that that provision by state agents is being financed by users or third parties in default of being paid for by the state itself. This informal privatisation at the level of everyday living has become almost institutionalised, and it allows goods of general interest to be provided to some degree in spite of the failures of the state. The most striking example is security. The costs (fuel and per diems) of off-base patrols and interventions in conflicts in the countryside by gendarmerie and the FNIS are paid for by the mayor's office, either on the basis of contributions by peasants collected by the

chiefs, or by the complainant himself. These practices are public and are approved de facto by the representatives of the state, the Prefects (who themselves make use of some of the patrols). One might also mention the 'location' of elements of the FNIS at Balleyara by big traders to assure the security of their truck convoys. It is worth noting that the per diems issued to the security forces (6,500 CFA Fr per day) are significant compared with their salaries, and amount to a 'topping up' of their income. Informal privatisation is thus not just a practical device for making it possible to deliver the service; it also benefits the providers themselves.

This naturally brings us to the other side of informal privatisation, what happens when it no longer benefits anyone other than the provider and works to the detriment of the users, becoming even a racket, as happens for example when the forces of order entrap the fishermen of Say at night, or the midwives take excessive amounts of money from expectant mothers.

A strange and omnipresent 'special programme'

Ambulances, a decisive link in the struggle against maternal mortality (they alone permit rapid evacuation to an operating theatre in the case of complications) are present in the three sites thanks to the Special Programme of the President of the Republic. This is an important step forward. But various problems remain around this. It is necessary for someone to pay for the fuel, as well as the 'allowances' of the driver, the nurse and the obligatory officers of the FNIS on board. Furthermore, in the case of a breakdown there is no provision other than sending it to the government garage, where repairs can take months, with the effect that the vehicle is often off the road; the only other remedy is to seek contributions, a gift from a 'big man' or a gesture by the mayor's office.

This Special Programme, financed for several years with debt relief (therefore with the tacit agreement of the donors) is entirely conceived and implemented in the office of the President. It works like a mega-project, simultaneously internal to the state (since it is officials who do the implementation, from presidential counsellors to the Prefects) and by-passing the state (they are acting outside the normal procedures and hierarchies). It is also a central axis of the national investment policy, a major tool for rewarding traders and entrepreneurs who are 'friends' of the regime and a decisive propaganda tool for the President, who personally gets all the credit for all the initiatives of this programme (and for others too which have nothing to do with it!!). The Special Programme is involved at the village level in the construction of infrastructure (health units, schools, small dams), the delivery of micro-credit to women's groups, the sale of grain at moderate prices and rural electrification as well as provision of ambulances to all districts. One of the problems is that the quality of the infrastructure built by the programme is poor (delivery and controls skimpy or non-existent) and the necessary administrative support (personnel, operating credit) is lacking. Moreover, the actions undertaken in the framework of the Special Programme can infringe the norms of the

state itself: thus, the construction of health units does not respect the sanitary criteria laid down by the Health Ministry.

It may be noted that the coup d'état of February 2010, in putting an end to the ultimately unconstitutional regime of President Tandja, also put an end to this famous special programme, and has ordered an audit of its management.

5.2 The important but unevenly distributed role of projects

Development projects have become unavoidable actors in the local delivery of general-interest goods, making up to some extent for the shortcomings of the state, at the same time by providing public services with some of the means of operation that they lack, and substituting for them by means of direct interventions or the promotion of associational structures.

The avalanche of acronyms of the external actors present in the three sites is testimony of this: FICOD, SNV, AMA, PDLT, PVDT, FSIL, IR, FAO, AREN, PAC, WAWI, FSIL, BADEA and some others. Most often, the interventions are not coordinated, each DP or NGO having its own action programme. The state services officially in charge of coordination (Community Development) and the mayors complain of never receiving reports or of being sidelined (in particular for water: 'Each of them put their wells where they like'!) At the same time, certain projects paradoxically support the idea of creating local coordination structures (cf. below).

External aid can be about infrastructure or about operational inputs, training or finally management systems (these elements often being combined).

The bulk of local investment is thus the work of projects. Neither the communes nor the state have budgets for investment using their own funds, and all work in the expectation of eventual external finance. Markets are the typical case: while the communes, like the state, depend on the taxes raised in markets as their principal local fiscal resource, the do not invest a single franc in these markets, and in the three sites the rehabilitation of the locations and the construction of modern infrastructure (cattle markets, sanitation, offices, fencing and abattoirs) has been the work of DPs (A German project, FICOD, invested 200 million CFA Fr in Balleyara). One might also cite modern tube wells, mini-irrigation systems and human-labour pumps, all of which are these days financed by projects.

Regarding operational expenditures, the role of projects is more difficult to capture. It is very variable across the services, sometimes it completes an effort by the state or communes and sometimes it constitutes the only real resource. In health, external interventions are of the 'complementary' type, in particular in the form of 'vertical' programmes like the general provision for patient-centred ante-natal consultations, or the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV-AIDS. In contrast, water services

work only with the support of projects, either in the form of help to communes, villages or groups of individuals to set up projects, or in the form of monitoring and control of the depots, but always with some personal financial assistance from the project. In this case, the support to operations is associated with informal privatisation (cf. above). A typical device is to nominate a member of the local technical service of the state as the 'focal point' of the project, which gives him a minimal level of operational facilitation, places him in the organigram and requires him to provide services on his own account.

The distribution of trainings of all sorts among local actors (state agents, elected councillors and mayors, auxiliary personnel, members of management committees) is another important activity, one which constantly mobilises human resources in the three sites and is entirely project-financed. The TBAs are an example of a group trained in this way.

Finally the interventions of projects under the infrastructure or the operational inputs headings also imply the importation of a certain amount of institutional engineering, in other words, procedures and management systems. Thus, the rehabilitation of the markets was accompanied by a strong pressure for the creation of 'management committees' for the markets. The support to household waste disposal also passes through the creation of neighbourhood committees. The support to the communes has been linked to the preparation of 'commune development plans'.

But the DP interventions are unequally distributed between the goods and their basic components: on security in general, on sanitation and on water quality for example, they are little involved. Some of the main bottlenecks are thus ignored by projects, each of which pursues its own particular logic, searching out problems for the solutions it is offering (Naudet, 1999).

5.3 The mayors offices now indispensable but ...

Decentralisation is recent: the communes with their municipal councils and elected mayors were only created in 2004. Furthermore, the state has scarcely aided the process, having failed to deliver the promised subventions or even to pass on to them the taxes which are their due, and showing itself more concerned to control and even repress them than to support them.

On the other hand, the mayors, generally elected on the basis of local coalitions between parties, have been challenged a great deal, and sometimes deposed, mostly on the basis of suspicions of misappropriation. In nearly two-thirds of communes, there have been attempts to depose mayors, and in nearly one-third of cases they have been successful. This testifies both to the importance of local factional struggles and to the role played by the 'room for suspicion' that is a feature of collective management (accusations of

misappropriation have been long omnipresent in the management committees of the cooperatives introduced by the developmentalist regime).⁶

Our sites are no exception to this rule: in Say and Guidan Roundji the respective mayors were deposed and replaced. In Balleyara, there were actually two successive depositions, and the municipality now has its third mayor!

The problems and difficulties of the communes do not stop there. Budgets are not always respected (rates of recovery of anticipated revenues are almost always under 50% and sometimes much less). Operating expenses on account of staffing and per diems consume most of the revenue. The municipal commissions [specialised committees] do not meet. The majority of councillors are illiterate and cannot master the procedures. Numerous mayors are of local origin but do not live locally.

And yet, despite these problems and difficulties, the communes have in the space of a few years made themselves indispensable. The mayors have taken a prominent place among the important actors in the local arena, especially at the level of the administrative centre of the canton. The mayor's office has become a central institution to which other local actors and notables now have to take into account. Its competences, initially quite fuzzy, have little by little more defined, and are scarcely contested. The Prefects are little by little relaxing their grip. Tax revenues from markets are significant. The budgets, insufficient as they may be, and whatever the weaknesses in their management, contribute in a non-negligible fashion to the provision of goods of general interest, including to alleviating some of the bottlenecks, even if in ways that reveal numerous incapacities which must not be forgotten.

Because the markets are the principal resource for the communes, the latter have recruited a network of tax collectors who have replaced those previously nominated by the chiefs, and they have been active everywhere in increasing the rate of tax recovery. 72 collectors work every Sunday at the market of Balleyara. The obvious limitation of the current system is that being appointed as a tax collector is a reward given to the militants of the political parties in power, and habits are well established under which funds 'evaporate'.

The mayor's office puts little back into the markets from its own resources, and relies on external projects when it comes to infrastructure. At the same time, one may note the recruitment by the municipality of a guard for the Balleyara cattle market.

Sanitation is now clearly the responsibility of the communes. In general, the communes are served by a Hygiene and Sanitation Officer (a civil servant placed at the disposition of the commune) but he scarcely plays a role, and he is generally located in the health units. The mayors' offices also have manual labourers, but these are badly paid, often

⁶ Cf. among others Dagobi (2002), Olivier de Sardan and Dagobi (2002), Souley and Hahonou (2005).

not paid and not very effective. We discuss later on their efforts on household waste disposal based on community-based management committees.

Mayors are only marginally involved in security and health, limited to putting a little money into the maintenance or repair of gendarmerie vehicles or the ambulance. They have no authority over the forces of order or over health personnel. Nevertheless, they have been involved in the efforts to provide the needed extra pennies for evacuations, and indeed in Balleyara it was the mayor's office that took the initiative.

5.4 The chiefdoms: a reduced field of competences but continuing influence

The canton chiefs (they are the most important and by far the most prestigious level of the administrative chiefdom)⁷ have been deprived of certain of their competences in favour of the mayors. In particular, they no longer have authority over markets (assignment of places; choice of tax collectors and tax collection). But they retain more or less officially two functions: the collection of personal levies (the commune tax) on behalf of the mayor's office; and primary-level hearings on divorce cases and rural conflicts (like land disputes or the conflicts between agriculturalists and herders). They continue to maintain courtiers and 'horsemen' (*dogari*) in their service. At the village level, where the municipalities are absent (the sub-municipal level is the weak link of decentralisation), the village chiefs remain the only real form of public authority. The mayors refer to them, as do other agents who have matters to pursue in the rural milieu.

Today the chiefs, who were and remain auxiliaries of the state, are thus condemned to collaborate with the mayors' offices as they did previously (and still do) with the Prefects and other services of the state.

The canton chiefs also retain important influence through two channels: on the one hand, they are by right members of the commune councils (on a consultative basis); on the other hand, they 'place' and protect their 'kinsmen and dependants' at the level of various local structures (municipal council, management committees, health personnel, garbage truckers, etc.). This influence by way of clientele can block reforms and create a local bottleneck, as in Guidan Roundji where the midwife (known locally as the 'queen mother') and other kin of the canton chief employed in the health sector seem to be 'untouchables' whom it is impossible to move despite innumerable criticisms of their behaviour from both their superiors (doctors) and service users.

Finally, the canton chiefs, who these days are usually former government officials, sometimes senior officials, play from time to time a 'broker' role in regard to projects (as in Guidan Roundji for the rehabilitation of the wells).

⁷ On the administrative chiefdom in Niger, see Tidjani Alou (2009).

5.5 *The occasional effectiveness of corporate private-sector bodies, formal (bus owners' and drivers' associations) or informal (dillal)*

The most obvious case of an effective corporate body is that of the market bus stations. The organisation of the duty roster for managing passengers and the departure of vehicles, the loading of baggage, the collection of passenger fares, the collection of trade-union levies and the commune departure tax payable by the owners, security surveillance and pursuit of petty thieves, the delivery of financial compensation in cases of lost baggage, control of clandestine loading on departure from the town – all of that is taken in hand by a combined committee of the drivers' union and the association of proprietors of passenger fleets. It uses a system of teams (by lines and shifts) and an allocation formula for funds collected which is very complex but totally functional. The bus station of Balleyara is a spectacular case in point. In Say, the union/association even pays a labourer to sweep the station, which is particularly clean.

The transporters' organisations have been formally recognised by the state since the days of the *syndicat unique* under the RDA regime and then under the military, and they still have the right to erect road blocks to check that drivers are in good standing in relation to the union. Nevertheless, there is no explicit legal text which authorises them to take charge of the bus stations in the way they have (which is an issue we are exploring).

The sale of livestock through brokers (*dillal* or *dillan*) is an older arrangement. Nevertheless, the livestock brokers have adapted to modern market sale conditions and, little by little, have put in place a complex and functional system, with a menu of charges for each type of livestock detailing precisely what is due to the broker: the payment of the presentation tax for each animal taken in hand, its maintenance (water and food) and the meal for the owners of the big ruminants. The owners must supply guarantee (with his assets) that the animals are not stolen; the commissions are paid over according to a well established scale of charges.

The abattoirs too are managed in an apparently satisfactory way by the associations of butchers.

The traders' associations offer a more qualified picture. They have a degree of effectiveness in some domains (in Balleyara the association pays watchmen and guards on market day, and in Say the traders make contributions to pay sweepers). However, they are often decried for their lack of effectiveness in relation to conflicts, cleansing, tax collection and management of space.

5.6 *The flowering of small trades*

Around the edges of the delivery of the four general-interest goods, a myriad of small jobs has flowered, filling gaps in the delivery chain or becoming grafted onto it: for

water and sanitation, there are plumbers, cesspool emptiers, well-diggers and masons, water sellers, and supervisors of stand-pipes and latrines; for security, guards, militiamen and watchmen; for the markets, loaders, general labourers, porters, sack-makers, *coxeurs* [minibus touts], brokers of various levels and their apprentices, motorbike taxis and tax collectors; for health, midwives, consulting-room assistants, guards, handymen and ambulance drivers.

Sometimes, these small trades give rise to a small rural artisan business, such as the fabrication of plastic bags containing 'pure' water (*pya wata*).

5.7 *The criticised presence of big private firms*

In two of our three sites, large private companies are present. SEEN (Société d'Exploitation des Eaux du Niger, a subsidiary of the international group Veolia) distributes water in Say and Guidan Roundji. But they are blamed for not guaranteeing the continuity and quality of the service, for unduly frequent interruptions and, in Guidan Roundji, for the bad taste of the water.

SONITEL (Société Nigérienne de Téléphone) and NIGELEC (Société Nigérienne d'Electricité) have installations in the commune of Say and on this basis should pay significant taxes to the commune. But they accumulate arrears which the commune does not manage to recover.

6 **Some potential variables**

The variables which might explain better performance in the delivery of the four goods are particularly difficult to identify. There are various possible reasons for this, which we will not go into here. We shall try simply to propose some candidates for the status of 'explanatory variables', commenting on our choices and their implications.

1) *Coordination among local actors and institutions* seems to us the No. 1 candidate. Monopolies of provision no longer exist, if they ever really did. No mode of local governance, no institution and no privileged actor is a sole player in respect of any of the goods. Co-production of goods of public interest, within a variety of delivery configurations, being the most frequent state of affairs, what matters is *the conditions under which each delivery configuration optimises or not the possibilities for collective action, and tackles the key bottlenecks identified for each good.*⁸

⁸ We might try to relate this proposition to the analysis of Peter Evans which David Booth (2009) has summarised for us on the conditions which might permit positive synergy between state agents and engaged citizens, namely complementarity and embeddedness as well as a favourable context and a successful effort to construct relationships. At first sight, we are not dealing with issues on the same scale, we are not considering the same objects and we are not using the same analytical framework, but all of this deserves reflection and debate.

This has two implications.

The first is that chiefdom needs from now on to be regarded in a fresh perspective. On the one hand, the chiefdom is no longer an institution that is in a position to deliver goods in an autonomous fashion; it is not even a central actor in the various configurations. But in contrast it plays an important role in respect of coordination or linkage, because of the influence it has retained, albeit sometimes in a negative mode: without the agreement of the chief, or without a minimum engagement on his part, a collective action can be strongly handicapped. The chiefs have an important veto power. Sometimes they have a capacity for initiative, although this is strongly affected by personality factors. The fact that many chiefs are former senior officials, that they have important networks within the higher levels of the public service, and that they have many of 'their men' sitting in the municipal councils, also reinforces their strategic position in relation to problems of coordination. But it should be noted that this applies more to chiefs than to the chiefdom: the latter has lost most of its competences.

The second consequence is that we must abandon the formal/informal opposition, to the extent that:

- (a) coordination implies formal as much as informal actors (for example, the *gendarmerie*, the Prefect, private security guards, *yambanga*, mayors and the chief's horsemen, all contribute to security);
- (b) the formal actors themselves often operate in an informal manner (e.g. the FNIS escorting trucks on their own account);
- (c) the informal actors are often in the process of seeking formal recognition (the case of the *yambanga*; cf. Lund, 2009).

In addition, this variable needs to be decomposed into sub-variables if we are to respond to the question: what is it that permits the coordination of the actors and institutions involved in co-delivery at the local level so as to improve the provision of goods?

Various situations encountered during the field studies are suggestive in this respect:

- A strong political will from the state at the central level (to be sure, episodic and in the manner of politicians): guaranteeing of the referendum of Aug 2009.
- Strong prompting/structuring by a project bringing together all of the technical services: the vulnerability observatory.
- A long-term public policy founded on the mobilisation of internal resources, but largely framed internationally: cost recovery in the health system.
- An innovative public policy addressing land security, supported by the Development Partners (DPs): the COFO, land commissions bringing together all of the stakeholders.
- Local initiatives by Health Committees, picked up and duplicated by other Health Committees: the additional pennies to pay for evacuations.

2) *The decisive role of local reforming leaders* seems to be candidate No. 2. In other words, every improvement in the delivery of goods involves a form of charisma (in the Weberian sense). And personal relationships are central to the various processes of informal coordination to which we have drawn attention. But this observation, which may seem banal (although it is often forgotten in making development policies), has two important implications:

- how can the action of a reformer become ‘routinised’ so that it outlives the particular individual?
- under what conditions are reformers able to emerge?

The first question poses the problem of *local reformist alliances*. The actions undertaken by an isolated reformer never survive his departure. Routinisation implies in all cases the adoption of the reform measures by a significant collectivity of concerned actors (in practice by certain active members of the delivery configuration). The question can also be formulated like this: how is a reformer likely to succeed in transforming the prevailing practical norms (for example, by modifying certain aspects of the professional culture of a state service or municipal council)?

The second question poses the problem of the relation between ‘*reform contexts*’ (that is, favourable institutional conditions) and the presence of ‘reformers’ (determined by particular career paths). Thus, certain public policies (generally co-produced by the state and donors) can create ‘windows of opportunity’ which certain local actors can seize upon with a view to improving the delivery of a good. This leads us to the next variable.

3) *A local strategic utilisation of the DPs* seems a good candidate. Quite often, the presence of the DPs (which we have seen to be long-term, endemic, structural and thus very much not the ‘temporary support to take-off’ which it claims to be) provides ‘reform contexts’ and ‘windows of opportunity’. The capacity of local leaders to mobilise the DPs to address critical bottlenecks (or to ‘manipulate’ projects to serve local development objectives) should therefore be considered carefully. This implies considering the DPs not as a source of external intervention, but as a resource susceptible to mobilisation by local actors

This leads us to distance ourselves from the customary tendency to set up an opposition between the *endogenous* (local and informal) and the *exogenous* (development projects) so that donor interventions are seen only in terms of the imposition of norms from outside which are badly adapted to local contexts (which for the most part they are). A public policy, even if it is initiated by an external donor (development agency or Northern NGO) always gets incorporated, at the moment of implementation in the field, in the strategies, logics and games of local actors (thereby being either ‘appropriated’ or ‘deflected’). In turn, these processes in which external interventions get internalised can allow a reforming actor to take advantage of a new public policy (in other words, a set

of imported norms or attempt at macro-reform, all new public policies being presented as ‘reforms’) in order to transform it into a micro-reform (or a meso-reform, depending on the level) according to his own agenda, even as other actors attempt to neutralise the initiative in the interests of preserving the old delivery modalities.

In addition, the operation of the state at the local level cannot itself be dissociated any longer from the modes of intervention of the DPs, which have become bearers of resources and procedures which are unavoidable.

4) *Informal privatisation* seems a possible explanatory variable despite appearances, to the extent that it can permit under certain conditions the continued provision of a service, albeit on commercial terms, when the state is no longer able to meet its obligations: collecting contributions to pay for the fuel and per diems of the *gendarmes* so that they can do their rounds, or contributions to pay private guards. In such cases, informal privatisation comes together with a certain form of formal privatisation, as with cost-recovery in health, which is in effect a national system of semi-privatisation: the state pays the salaries of the health personnel, and the users pay for the medicines. There are in fact two types of formal privatisation: a) that in which the user is obliged to pay for a part of what was previously provided free of charge by the state, where the state remains officially the provider, and b) that which involves the transfer of state enterprises to the private sector. Only the first is of interest here, as everything about it suggests a convergence with certain forms of informal privatisation: in the two cases, the user is obliged to contribute, with an immediate payment, to the delivery by state agents of a public good which the state continues to finance in part; what is involved is thus the establishment of a system of state-user co-financing.

To be sure, there also exists another form of informal privatisation, where the user finances not just part of the delivery of the service, but also a premium which accrues directly to the official in question. The latter, paid by the state to deliver a service, only does so if he is also paid by the user. This is one of the ‘elementary forms of corruption’ (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006).

The problem is that, often, these two types of informal privatisation are intermingled. When a trader pays the *gendarmes* to escort his lorry, he is co-financing the delivery of a public service, but he also provides a ‘bonus’ to the *gendarme*.

State-user co-financing of public services (in the form of either formal or informal semi-privatisation) poses, nevertheless and for the same reasons, the intractable problem of access for the poorest: in the absence of any stable institutional support to the most deprived, to what extent are there systems of social solidarity (based on family, patronage or charity) which permit the latter to get access without payment to goods that are only provided in exchange for cash?

5) The *system of contributions* is an equally common form of state-user co-financing. This can arise from informal privatisation, but it can also be a form of direct delivery of a service which does not pass through the state. In contrast with the payment by the individual at the point of delivery, which is the dominant form of state-user co-financing, the contributions are collected and managed by intermediary actors. In the face of the various problems of equipment, operations and maintenance which afflict the delivery of public goods, recourse to ‘contributions’ is generalised. These *ad hoc* charges affecting users or the actors involved in the service provision are generally voluntary. It is a simple, effective system which expresses well the general-interest character of the good in question. The initiative can come from several types of actors: the chiefs (in the case of the contributions by villages to pay the fuel and per diems of the forces of order so that they can deal with the devastating annual transhumance of the Oudah Fulani), the big traders (for market cleaning), the mayor’s office (for payment of the garbage truckers who dispose of the household waste).

Contributions are also called for to meet project conditionalities. In fact, projects when they are planning to make some local investment often require a minimum financial contribution from the population, known as the ‘social counterpart’ or ‘quota’. For projects, this contribution is supposed to guarantee ‘participation’ by the population and to provide evidence of their interest in the investment in question. It is interesting to observe that sometimes it is a single actor who makes this contribution on behalf of the population. In other words, someone substitutes himself for the individual contributors, paying the whole amount himself; this may be a patron-sponsor [*mécène*], and can also be the municipality.

The system of contributions has certain limits:

- The excessive resort to contributions (in contexts where the users, who are those expected to contribute are permanently short of cash) engenders a progressive demotivation.
- The management of the funds from contributions is the object of permanent suspicions of misappropriation directed against the intermediary actors.

6) *Corporate bodies arising from the private commercial sector* also seem to be very good candidates (cf. the discussion of the transporters’ organisations and livestock brokers above). The case of the bus and lorry stations in Senegal (preliminary research by Veronica Temesio-Gómez) makes this even more interesting, as it supports similar conclusions about the role of a corporate body, yet one that has a different basis. It remains to be established why transport stations (and brokerage in livestock markets) are the domains where this type of collective organisation is put in place.

7) Perhaps, drawing on the other examples discussed earlier, we should consider the forms assumed by *the organisation of work and the management of human resources* as important variables. Not only the state, but also communes and associations, the three

modes of local governance broadly considered to be dedicated to delivering collective goods (this is their official mission, reaffirmed constantly in public discourse), all suffer from extreme problems of work organisation and human resource management. The lack of appropriate strategies, policies, team-working and competencies, leaves these organisations in the grip of innumerable forms of improvisation, inconsistency, double-speak and the clientelisms by which they are, in fact, regulated. The available management methods are all in the form of ‘kits’ imported from the outside in successive waves, from the colonial discipline of the *chicotte* [sjambok, kiboko], recycled with various borrowings by the ‘authoritarian’ and military regimes, through classic European bureaucratic proceduralism, to the instruments of the New Public Management. These systems have never grafted successfully onto local administrative, communal or associational structures. What is remarkable about the corporate organisations is perhaps that they have partly resolved this problem. There are surely other types of solution. This needs exploring.

8) *Collective mobilisations* are another line of enquiry (and we must not forget here the trade unions). One of the principal successes of the military regime of Kountché, which elicits the strongest nostalgia, was the rehabilitation, extension, coordination and structuring of the *samaria*, youth groups organised by the authorities in a sort of huge neo-traditional federation with a presence in all villages and very active in community and cultural affairs. This was the regime’s mass membership organisation. It involved the majority of young people and generated a certain degree of enthusiasm around activities including theatrical festivals, cleaning days (collective street sweeping), social and sports events, reception of visitors, dancing and singing competitions between villages and collective village works. The coming of democracy brought all this to a spontaneous end. The military dictatorship did not just rest upon on a vertical discipline based largely on fear. It also had the capacity to organise popular mobilisation on an everyday basis, something that the political parties have not been able to re-create.

The experience of the Civic Forum being followed by Blundo in Senegal may involve some proposals for the reinvention of forms of collective mobilisation. The advances being reported in Rwanda may be relevant to this variable.

9) Another hypothesis merits discussion. Can one take into account the existence of strong religious commitments, implying a role for ethical values? Insecurity seems less severe in Say than elsewhere, which according to our interlocutors is explained by its character as almost a ‘holy city’, founded by a famous sheikh whose descendants constitute the local elite.⁹ The town is also cleaner. One might think, on the same lines,

⁹ On the other hand, taking the religious variable into account would seem to go wrong in attributing a role to the ‘community’, a concept that is in general the result of modern and conjunctural actions by politico-religious entrepreneurs. The same would apply to ‘ethnic’ variables. These do not emerge as important among our sites (all being multi-ethnic around a dominant group which is itself divided), but it could certainly become so in other sites if politico-ethnic entrepreneurs get their hands on them.

that the dominance of one village by followers of the Assemblies of God would also account for the lower rate of delinquency.

But various objections can be raised. Everywhere in Niger, Islam is the ultra-dominant religion, but that does not prevent there being numerous departures from ethics of probity, charity or respect for others, which are generally deplored in all the sites.

Nor has Islam caused the disappearance of the various traditional or neo-traditional magico-religious specialists (priests of possession cults, diviners, healers and makers of charms), and has rather added its own (*marabouts*). But these actors 'work' after a fashion for everybody: for the thieves and the gendarmes alike, to protect husbands or seduce them, to assist a candidate in elections while also getting his opponent elected, and for sellers as well as buyers. It is therefore not easy to establish what influence they have, despite the frequent recourse that is had to them, on the delivery of public goods.

Nevertheless, one may conjecture that the overall influence of these actors is unfavourable to collective action, and tends instead to reinforce the antagonisms, rivalries, suspicions and accusations. This is what is stressed by public opinion: they gain their income from conflicts and have an interest in stirring them up. If they do not create, they at least enlarge the spaces in which social and symbolic insecurities prevail. It would seem to follow, therefore, that the most widespread magico-religious practices (individual consultations with specialists for the purposes of obtaining some kind of 'spell') are, contrary to many clichés, a barrier to collective action.

Conversely, sects (Islamic as well as 'Isalist' sects, and others more recently) provide their followers with safe havens in which they are protected from aggressive magic or witchcraft, rivalries and moral degradation, at the price, it is true, of isolation from the ordinary Islamic and societal sociability of their surroundings (and a sometimes sharp break with the normal delivery of certain public services, e.g. refusal of vaccinations).

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