DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AS ARENAS OF NEGOTIATION FOR STRATEGIC GROUPS

A case study from Bénin

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Instead of the widely held mechanistic notion of a project that plays its part and of those concerned (the target group) who react, a dynamic concept of interaction between strategic groups seems to be more plausible for analysing development projects at micro-level. Project implementation does not mean carrying out an already-planned programme but is a constant process of negotiation. One must begin with an analysis of the project’s participants and other interest groups, the goals and reasons for their negotiations, resources they have at hand – in short, of their own respective projects.

The groups involved compete with one another for the economic, political or even symbolic resources provided by the project. This usually means that projects are neither complete failures nor completely successful in the light of the original goals. The success of the project, rather, is selective due to the differing extent to which the strategic groups involved or affected can appropriate resources resulting from that project, which depends on their political pull. But while the project presents a common arena of negotiation for all groups involved, they act according to their own interests, using very different frames of reference for social interaction, rationalisation of action and cultural views of the world.

The image we should have in mind is that of a complex chess game with living chessmen, in which there are many players. Some of them control many more pawns than their competitors are able to put on the board. Some are only allowed a few moves, whereas others can, if necessary, change the rules to their own advantage. The goals of the players vary as much as their stakes and risks. Probably some of the participants play according to rules which the others do not know. They play a game which consists mainly of negotiating about establishing generally accepted rules but where, on the other hand, good tactics and strategy count as well. For resources are dependent upon context and a good player can turn even a catastrophe into an advantage.

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The field research on a German-Bénin project for promoting traditional cattle-farming in the north of the People's Republic of Bénin (Projet Promotion de l'Elevage dans l'Atacora – PPEA) on which this article is based, was carried out between December 1985 and April 1987 and is fully dealt with in Bierschenk and Forster (1987) and Bierschenk (1988). The description of the history of the project ends in September 1986, so that any later modifications of the project approach are not taken into account. In addition this article is based on observations made since 1983 in other development projects in West Africa as well as on work for the International Labour Organization (ILO) during 1981-1984.

I hope that the criticism presented here will not be taken as the know-all attitude of an academic far removed from practical experience who, in retrospect, explains how things should have been done in the first place without considering the manifold pressures under which project management has to act. I am trying, rather, to show how a project, apparently well conceived, in spite of good intentions and the high professional competence of its staff, runs into difficulties which could neither have been foreseen nor avoided, but which seriously jeopardized the success of its initial integrated approach. In doing so, I want to demonstrate a certain form of analysis, using an example chosen at random which can be considered typical.

AGRO-PASTORALISM AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN NORTH BENIN

Cattle farming in north Bénin lies in the hands of the Fulani (fulbe, French Peuhl) who keep their own cattle as well as cattle on behalf of cultivators (in the project area mostly baatonu/bariba). The basic social unit of the Fulani is an economically largely independent household (wuro) which is also spatially separate from others, consisting generally of an extended polygamous family of three generations. Several households, usually about ten, make up a hamlet (gure), which in space and social structure represents nothing more than a collection of households without any spatial, economic or political centre. (The term gure expresses only the plural of wuro.)

The economic and political central functions are performed by villages of the cultivators to which one or several hamlets of the Fulani are attached. Since before colonial times, the Baatonu have been the dominant ethnic group, both numerically and politically, of north-east Bénin (Lombard 1965). In the project area the Baatonu are estimated to make up 60% and the Fulani 24% of the population. The relations of these groups to one another are marked by limited economic exchange and great social distance. Neither the divide et impera policy of the French nor independence and revolution have reduced the political marginalization of the Fulani. This has been shown over recent years in the shape of increasing conflicts.
with cultivators over the use of land. More and more land is being used for cropping, especially for cotton.

Fulani households follow a strategy of combining cattle farming (with herds of about ninety head per household), crop cultivation and gathering (mainly sheabutter and néré), whereby subsistence and market production are combined. This renders the agro-pastoral mode of production of the Fulani very flexible and is the basis of great economic autonomy of the individual household. One essential goal of cattle farming is milk production. It is not only the staple food of the family but also brings in a vital part of the family’s monetary income. Sale of milk rests wholly in the hands of women.

Although the Fulani are in principle sedentary, the major characteristic of cattle farming in North Bénin is transhumant nomadism because of the long dry season. As the watering places increasingly dry up a great part of the herds, accompanied by the young men of the family, leave for the remaining watering places. Distances can vary from ten to seventy kms. Owing to the strain of travelling itself, the lack of veterinary care in inaccessible areas as well as the great danger of infection due to a concentration of animals near the remaining watering places, mortality is particularly high, especially amongst young animals. In addition transhumance usually leads to weight losses in the cattle. On the other hand, there is a positive aspect from the ecological point of view in that certain grazing grounds can recover. It is also an integrating factor in Fulani society as it gives the individual household members the opportunity of meeting one another. This is an important factor in forming marriage alliances and for certain feasts (gojja) which take place within the age-group system (waldere).


When Benin cadres or German experts tell the story of the PPEA, it always begins at the end of the 1970s with inter-governmental negotiations and project identification studies. It may seem surprising, therefore, to begin here at another level, with the actions of the Fulani, later to be declared the ‘target group’ of the project. Many Fulani remember better than experts and cadres that it was the Fulani themselves who took the initiative to improve their water supply, independent of discussions between the various specialists.

Winter 1980/1981 in the district of Pehonco was so dry that the Fulani were forced to depart with their herds even before the millet harvest. This caused the délégué of the Fulani hamlet of Sinaourarou, one of the only two Fulani in the district who were members of the Benin Marxist-Leninist party to take the initiative. He called a meeting of Fulani in which the mayor of Pehonco and the other Fulani party member who was a
veterinary agent of the provincial agricultural development agency (CAR- DER) and besides this, son of the old, pre-revolutionary family of Fulani chiefs of Pehonco, also participated. The meeting called for the building of a catchment basin which would retain water at least until the millet harvest was in. This request was passed on to the district officer. After a further meeting in 1981, four such catchment basins were planned and money was collected for this purpose. In addition, in 1983 some Fulani managed to dam a small stream which provides water for some thousands of cattle. Of course, the primitive dam had to be repaired every year, but the Fulani have been able to manage this up to now without any technical help.

Several important aspects of the early Fulani initiatives to improve their water supply are worth emphasizing here. Catchment basins were built in places where grazing grounds could not be used because of water shortage. The Fulani's main reason for doing this was not to stop nomadizing but to delay their departure until the harvest was in and the cattle could graze the stubble. The principal motive was to keep their agro-pastoral mode of production flexible. The building of catchment basins was based on a genuine initiative of the Fulani. In this, the charismatic délégué of Sinourarou, a member of the new local elite created by the revolution of 1972, as well as the mayor of Pehonco who had successfully fused a traditional claim to leadership with a post-revolutionary elite position, played a stimulating role. Both had the necessary contacts with the regional and provincial administration. The Baatonu were drawn into this process of mobilization only at a later date at the suggestion of the government. Finally, contrary to widespread opinion, the Fulani were able to work on the building themselves.

The Fulani certainly did not know that the Governments of the People's Republic of Bénin and the Federal Republic of Germany had already agreed towards the end of the 1970s to carry out a development programme on animal production in the Atacora. Following a German project proposal and intergovernmental negotiations, the project began in June 1983 (cf. Bierschenk et al. 1986, 18-21).

According to documents that served as a basis for the project, the project objectives were variously defined as:
- increase in income of the cattle farmers;
- improvement in output of the animal production sector;
- preservation of ecological balance;
- reduction in transhumance.

They are put together in different combinations and given different priorities. But it can be assumed that the project aims essentially to transform livestock farming from what is considered traditional, supposedly aimed at increasing family prestige, into a so-called modern form based on notions of economic returns.
Just as unclear and inconsistent are the various definitions of the target group. Generally one speaks of the target group as an occupational group – in this case the cattle farmers (éleveurs). This corresponds with the technical approach of the PPEA and avoids ethnic classifications that might be accused of tribalism. Sometimes a distinction is made between nomad and settled cattle farmers. Often the general term ‘population’ is used. None of these terms corresponds to the emic social definitions of the inhabitants of the project area who see themselves in the first place as fulani or as baatonu.

The participation of the population in the choice of sites for the catchment basins was specifically intended by the project. And so it came to pass that Fulani remember, in the village of Kika for example, that one day German and Benin collaborators of the PPEA arrived in their cars and asked Fulani and Baatonu where there were watering places that retained their water longest, even in the dry season. It was a matter, they explained, of building barrages (dams, in Fulfulde: baraaji), a term which, however, meant nothing to most Fulani and Baatonu.

The watering places pointed out by the population were then examined hydro-geologically. It is noteworthy that some of the catchment basins are very near to Baatonu villages. It seems that alternative sites, more convenient for the Fulani, were not considered. After the building of the catchment basins had begun, the Fulani saw no sense in finishing the four dams planned through the Department for Public Works. There were no further large meetings like the one in 1982.

The dynamics of the social processes taking place in this phase of the project were more complex than the standard call in the development literature for ‘participation of the population’ suggests. In particular, it soon appeared that the term ‘population’ concealed the existing objective and subjective differences between the Baatonu and the Fulani. The term ‘participation’ is precise in that it makes clear that after 1984 the initiative no longer lay with the Fulani. When project activities began, the centre of political dynamics shifted into the arena of relations between governments, ministries and expert groups. When, in the end, the population was called upon to participate in the project the Baatonu dominated, a logical consequence of the socio-political situation in the project area, the choice of site and administration of the catchment basins. The resulting change in the concept of the target group is reflected in the formula for grazing unit councils drawn up in Spring 1985, widely diverging from the original, embodying parity of membership of Fulani and Baatonu. From being institutions of economic and political representation of the Fulani, they became a platform upon which potential conflicts between the Baatonu and the Fulani would be negotiated (and, ideally, solved).
The original plan was modified even further. Already in the second building season (1985/1986) some of the catchment basins at least, at the request of the Benin side, were constructed outside the central district of Pehonco although this created additional difficulties and did not tally with the original concept of catchment basins covering the whole of a given area. It was, however, important for the Benin Government to demonstrate that some project activities were under way in every district. That same season there were fierce conflicts at one of the watering places built the year before near a village in the district of Pehonco. Although the capacity of the basin was planned for watering up to 2000 head of cattle, only 250-300 frequented it. On the other hand, the population of the Baatonu village used the basin a great deal for drinking and washing purposes; the water taken by the women of the village amounted to more than twice what the cattle drank. The village well with hand pump, installed a short time before by another development project, was scarcely used. As it required some effort to use it and, more important, a small fee was charged for the water, the women preferred to draw water directly from the catchment basin in spite of the doubtful purity of the water.

In addition, the women consistently tried to block the cattle farmers’ access to the catchment basin. They did this by spreading out their freshly washed clothes over the area leading to the basin, leaving only a small lane about five metres wide. The herdsmen could hardly avoid some of their cattle treading on the clothes occasionally. This invariably led to wild abuse of the herdsmen, most of them young boys, as well as beating with sticks and stoning the cattle. Several cattle farmers declared that they wanted to avoid the basin if possible, because of these difficulties.

Besides the direct attempt of the Baatonu women to keep the Fulani away from the catchment basin there were also indirect ways of impeding access which would be much more effective in the long run. For example in Kika, one of the three experimental watering places built the first season, the local veterinary agent (one of the few Fulani in the veterinary service) was able to prevent a direct blockade of the watering place by washing women. Access of the Fulani to the basin is made difficult instead by a wide band of cotton fields several hundred metres away. These cotton fields, according to the Fulani, have only been in existence since the catchment basin was built. In discussion with the project collaborators both groups involved suggested that an access through the cotton fields should be marked out. The execution of this failed, however, due to resistance from the Baatonu. Similar problems, it is said, have occurred at other watering places.

In the summer of 1986, in the course of evaluating the project, the number and distribution of catchment basins to be built in the next phase was discussed. While the German side pleaded that planning documents
were not available for a quick expansion of building in other zones of the province, for the Benin Government representatives it was a question of constructing, if possible, a large number of basins distributed over the whole province. The main arguments here were that limiting building to only a few districts in the province could not be explained satisfactorily to the population outside the project zone. In addition, it would not be sensible from a business administration point of view not to use machines once they had been procured (Bierschenk et al. 1986).

THE PROJECT AS A FIELD OF NEGOTIATION

The above story can be interpreted using the concept, proposed at the beginning of this paper, of differing interests and rationalities of action clashing with each other in a heterogeneous field of action. In the development project described here the following seven strategic groups can be distinguished:
1) the government of the donor country
2) the government of the recipient country
3) the agency of the donor country entrusted with the project
4) foreign experts
5) national project staff (the cadres)
6) the target group of cattle farmers (Fulani) and
7) (not appearing in the original project documents but important because of the local balance of power) the cultivators (Baatonu).

The interests of the governments: primacy of politics

The driving motive for development aid to the poor countries of Africa on the part of donor governments is exercising political influence externally and establishing political legitimacy internally. The first refers to the direction of aid and is realized by dint of symbolic presence through development projects, in addition to other classic foreign policy means of exercising influence. Establishing internal political legitimacy involves the use of key notions with which the allocation of funds is legitimized. Development policy notions such as ‘participation of the population’, ‘basic needs’, ‘help for self-help’, ‘ecological agriculture’, ‘the poorest of the poor’ etc. are focused mostly on the internal political discourse in the donor country. The analytical value of these notions, however, is limited: the development discourse is aimed at convincing rather than at informing and analysing. This is true in a double sense: in the internal political debate in the donor country the flow of funds to the exterior must be represented as a good thing; the government and other strategic groups in the recipient countries must use these terms in order to be understood at all by the
potential donors. In both cases language is used strategically in order to mobilize funds.

The governments of the recipient countries, for their part, are mainly interested in the transfer of funds represented by development aid. This fulfils an important contribution in the legitimization of political power. A high-placed Benin politician declared in a personal conversation that, if he could manage to have plenty of catchment basins built in his province, he would have the cattle farmers eating out of his hand.

National experts and local cadres: technocratic versus political orientation of action

On the one hand, state administered development aid to Africa comes under the heading of politics with reference to its context of legitimization in the donor country as well as its implementation in the recipient country. On the other hand, however, the development agencies of the donors (and similar international organizations like the World Bank) constitute a system of meaning and action which systematically excludes politics. This becomes clear, for example, in the typical instruments of action like 'project cycle' and 'cost-benefit analysis'. Within this system of reference political processes are, or must be, defined as technical before they can successfully be dealt with. A project that, from a political point, is a Fulani project – in that it potentially takes the part of the marginalized in a latent conflict of interests between two social groups – seems, in this perspective, to be an animal production project.

Both these structures of action – abbreviated here to political and technocratic – clash with each other in the project itself, personified through the national staff and the foreign experts. I call this a heterogeneous arena of action, meaning that each group takes a different point of reference for its acts. For the experts this is cost-benefit calculations and the pressures of the project cycle. From a certain point on these create technical and economic constraints which lead, once the project is under way, to a situation where the main object of project management becomes disbursement, namely the timely flow of funds, and utilization of the expensive already-procured machinery. Similarly the individual expert orientates himself, above all, to the requirements of head office which determine his future destiny. The most important means of control that head office has are the reports the expert has to send in, which largely determine the timing and nature of his work. For headquarters, these reports essentially constitute project reality. This does not mean that the individual experts are not conscious of the political aspect of their work. It is crucial, however, that even when the expert is very conscious of these political aspects, actions must necessarily be justified within the technocratic categories of the project cycle.
For the national collaborators, on the other hand, the central reference point of action is the political process within the local political class. Whereas the flow of resources within the project is largely controlled by the foreign experts, personnel policy is completely in the hands of the locals. Various pieces of evidence – for example turnover of personnel after each change of minister – show the great importance of personnel politics as a technique of power in the Benin political class. In this process, patronage networks and informal associations, constituted on the basis of linguistic-ethnic and regional criteria, play an important role, independent of formal bureaucratic structure.

Experts and cadres are only partially aware of the action system of the other group. For the experts, political proceedings on the local side are seen above all as a troublesome factor in the smooth running of the project. For the Benin cadres on the other hand, the project is a stake in the economic and political reproduction strategies of the various patronage groups within the state apparatus. The individual cadre's main interest is centred, like that of the foreign experts, on the additional income and other benefits flowing from the project. Discussions about the complicated system of bonuses, further fringe benefits such as official residences, motorbikes, refrigerators (intended for storing veterinary medicines, but allowing the wife to run a small trade in beer) always take up a large portion of internal staff meetings. For the Benin cadres of middle level the smooth flow of these benefits seems to be the main criterion of the project's success.

The least problematic to implement are those project activities where the need for both donor and recipient to legitimize policies coincides with the technocratic implementation capacities of the executive agency and the experts. Therefore it is no accident that, in this case, reconstructing the veterinary medical service and building catchment basins – both technically defined and solvable tasks – were carried out without great difficulties.

Project and target group: 'participation' instead of 'communication'

A project can be understood as an attempt to isolate part of a social structure and submit it to control. The relationship of the project to the target group is also a question of control. Spittler (1984) has drawn attention to the fact that peasants generally only react to state policies during the implementation phase; practically never can they influence the drafting of agendas and planning documents. This was the case in the project described here. Forms of participation suggested to the Fulani (and later to the Baatonu on their insistence) were prescribed in detail. They were limited to demands for contributions of money and work to a
concept previously designed by project management. For these ‘voluntary’ contributions (cotisations) which are a general feature of rural development projects in Bénin, the borderline to tax becomes indistinct very easily. It is therefore of more than historic interest that, during the construction phase, the allocation of duties between monetary payments by the Fulani and contributions in direct labour by the Baatonu represented a direct continuation of a colonial tradition.

Part of this restricted interpretation of participation is the rigid canalization of the flow of information which runs mainly from the top downwards. When the Fulani, at the beginning of the 1980s, decided to improve the water supply for cattle they had already discussed this among themselves extensively. For the first time in living memory, it was said, the Fulani of the whole district of Pehonco assembled to discuss solutions to a common problem. With the start of the foreign-financed development project, this sense of initiative was replaced by vulgarisation, sensibilisation, mobilisation and encadrement.

With sensibilisation meetings it is a matter of convincing a small group (a fact which can be seen in the seating arrangements), that a certain measure decided by the project is worth carrying out and of mobilizing the target group for the tasks that were intended for them in this setting. Communication in the other direction is not systematically encouraged and seldom occurs, usually only when project activities have met with such resistance that essential goals appear to be in jeopardy.

Moreover by limiting the vulgarisation to individuals or small groups of the population, the exchange of information between and within the target groups is systematically blocked. The various lines of communication all meet at the peak. This creates ignorance on the level of the target group (Long 1984). It also has the effect of shifting the centre of initiative away from the target group into the arena of discussions between project, experts and governments. Joint initiatives by the Fulani themselves to improve their water supply, the results of which were certainly not ideal from a technical point of view, were thus destroyed for a technically more perfect solution.

**Maximisation of production versus assuring survival**

Some veterinary agents in the project area maintain that since the rebuilding of the veterinary medical service, making possible regular inoculation against cattle diseases such as tryposomia, cattle plague and anthrax, meat supply in the project area has not increased but rather decreased. Formerly the Fulani brought their sick animals for slaughter, whereas now, where sickness has been reduced, this is no longer necessary. This behaviour seems to support the view that cattle farming for the
Fulani is primarily directed towards prestige and therefore from an economic point of view irrational. I want to argue instead that the traditional cattle farming of the Fulani is directed towards securing reproduction and survival and that it is therefore altogether rational. For the Fulani, cattle farming is mainly the raising of cows. One reason for this is that cows' milk rather than beef is, next to maize and millet, the main staple food.

Concentrating on the raising of cows has a further rationale which can be called maximization of the reproductive capacity of the herd. The cattle farmer must take account of the fact that his herd can be reduced catastrophically and practically overnight through disease. For example, even the project's innoculation programme could not prevent more than half of many herds being destroyed by cattle plague in November 1985 in the districts of Kerou and Pehonco. The speed of regeneration to the original number of cattle in such herds is higher when there is a larger proportion of cows. Assuming that cattle plague strikes male and female beasts alike, the number of cattle in the remaining herd is directly dependent upon the number of cows in the original herd. Having as high a quota of cows as possible in the herd has, therefore, an important security and survival function.

This built-in growth tendency in the Fulani herds is strengthened by the intertwining of collective and individual owners' rights to herds belonging to one household. For young men, the fastest possible build-up of one's own herd to a level where it is capable of surviving a crisis, has priority over commercialization. Only those animals in a herd which are personal possessions of the family head can be put to commercial use.

Therefore, it is only on condition that there is a reliable and permanent veterinary cover that change from a strategy of cattle breeding which emphasizes maximum reproduction capacity to one where maximum attention is paid to meat production and commercialization, is feasible for the cattle farmers. However, the epidemics of 1985 have shown that the veterinary measures of the project have only been partially successful so far and the Fulani are certainly aware that this limited success has much to do with the infusion of outside money and expertise into the national veterinary service. So it would be extremely risky and therefore irrational for them to put such trust in the successful and permanent continuation of the veterinary cover that they would give up their traditional risk-minimizing strategy.

Conflicts within the target group: cultivators and cattle farmers

Relations between the economically, linguistically and socially distinct groups of cultivators (Batonu) and cattle breeders (Fulani) are politically unbalanced. In one way this is the result of historic developments, but today it arises mainly from two factors: 1) very low representation of the
Fulani in the Benin state class, which is due to the fact that the Fulani seldom send their children to school, and 2) the lack of legal titles to pastures.

In a region such as the Atacora with an average population density of 15 persons per square km, the latter factor does not seem to be a problem at first glance. In some places, however, the density of population can be very much higher. In addition a considerable expansion of cultivation has taken place recently and that mostly in connexion with the increased use of draught animals and cotton planting. For this reason conflicts between Baatonu and Fulani are frequently due to damage by cattle in cotton fields. This happens at the time of year when more grazing is needed because of the onset of the dry season and when, at the same time, cotton fields have not yet been harvested. The penalties demanded from the Fulani are often exorbitant and can easily exceed sums of F CFA 150,000. Local observers openly call this practice 'une façon d'arracher l'argent des Peuhl'.

Conflicts arising over the use of the catchment basins are only one aspect of the general land use conflicts between the groups. It was hoped that the concept of co-operative pastoral units put in charge of these basins with administrative committees staffed proportionately by Fulani and Baatonu, would allow the population to come to an agreement on the distribution of land for grazing and cultivating around the watering places. The committees have not faced this task up to now. Should matters go on like this, the Baatonu will soon dispossess the Fulani from the catchment basins.

This might also happen owing to the fact that the organization of pastoral units as suggested by the project, is not anchored in traditional social structures. Originally pastoral units were meant to represent the interests of cattle farmers. In the present form, balancing the interests of cultivators and cattle breeders has become the prime consideration. Under this new formula, with pastoral units intended to be a forum for discussing the differing interests of the two groups and at the same time a co-operative organization of cattle breeders, there is a logical rupture, the implications of which have not been systematically considered up to now. Planning has proceeded under the implicit assumption that common interests between both groups are stronger than conflicting ones. In fact, the Baatonu are structurally favoured in the present organization model because the pastoral units are based on the Baatonu concept of a village rather than the Fulani concept of a smaller hamlet. It was pointed out earlier that there is no visible Fulani organizational unit larger than the hamlet (gure). The true basic social unit is, rather, the household (wuro). The examples given of spontaneous collective self-organization of the Fulani at the beginning of the 1980s, all occurred at the hamlet level. The water basins constructed by the project, which were planned with few
exceptions to water 2000 or more head of cattle each and the pastoral units set up around them, overtaxed the Fulani's capacity for organization. This is not only a conclusion from abstract ethno-sociological analysis but also supported by an assertion of the Fulani themselves who demand 'not especially large but rather many watering places'".

CONCLUSION

The analytical model presented here contradicts current models of project implementation in vogue amongst development experts, where the structure of the project is not negotiable beyond a certain point, so that departures from the original concept can only be perceived as transgressions. In actual fact development projects represent a permanent process of negotiation between different strategic groups.

In this process of negotiation the individual groups not only have differing interests and resources, in other words their own respective projects, but they may act according to vastly different modes of action and cultural views of the world. Negotiations therefore turn largely on laying down valid 'rules of the game' for everybody. In this, the strategic use of language has a special importance. This means not only trying to work out 'language rules'. Even the meaning of the same expression can differ according to context. That which seems in the eyes of the experts and planners to be a single project is, in reality, many different ones, each group pursuing its own project. For some it is a question of realizing abstract ideological goals such as 'participation' and 'help for self-help' for 'the poorest of the poor', for others it is a matter of symbolic presence, the exertion of subtle political influence or the legitimization of power. Some orient their activities to abstract notions such as 'overall objectives', 'internal rate of interest' and 'cost benefit relations', or quantitative measures such as cubic metres of cement used. Others think of money when they hear 'project'. For some the project means a step forward in planning their careers, to save for an early retirement or to carry out critical sociological analyses. Others are mainly interested in improving their drinking water supply or building up their own herds. What is for some a project with a clear structure of objectives and activities, planned at great expense from a great distance and in a vastly different social environment, for others means that their cattle wear numbered earrings for puzzling purposes and are counted and weighed monthly by strangers.

On the other hand, behaviour by which human beings have tried to secure their own physical and cultural survival in ways established over centuries, seems from another perspective to be an antiquated economic system, impeding progress, damaging the ecology and, as such, irrational in the extreme. It is this struggle for perspective, interpretations and
concepts, material resources and political power which determines the strategic actions of social groups who, in the context of a development project, devise and carry out their own projects.

NOTES

1. The term ‘strategic groups’ was especially publicized by Evers (Evers & Schiel 1988). In contrast to Evers I am using it here at a micro-level.

2. The investigation grew out of a research project sponsored by Stiftung Volkswagenwerk on Sociostructural effects of development aid in rural areas of West Africa. The part described here was also assisted by the GTZ. I should like to thank both organizations. This concerns especially Claus Auer and Ulrich Mast of the GTZ whose friendly co-operation enabled me to carry out the research. This is quite unusual for a development organization as they expose themselves to potential criticism in doing so.

3. A similar form of analysis is suggested by Long (1984), Spittler (1984) and Olivier de Sardan (this issue) and demonstrated by Arce and Long (1986) and Crehan and von Oppen (this issue).

4. The social organization of the agro-pastoral Fulani in North Bénin, briefly sketched here, is described in detail in Bierschenk and Forster (1987).

5. It was perhaps not just a blunder that representatives of the local and district authorities as well as the Baatonu of neighbouring villages were all invited to the inaugural ceremony of a catchment basin in the district of Kerou in the summer of 1986, but the Fulani were not. The experts of PPEA who arranged the ceremony had simply forgotten to invite them.

6. As I have observed the corresponding disputes mostly from inside a development project, my chances of observing the strategies of the first three groups and in a certain sense the fifth were quite limited.

7. A German project manager was reproached by these middle cadres when he left the project prematurely, that he had ‘betrayed the project’ because he had not delivered the promised motorbikes for the Benin veterinary agents.

8. In the village of Maka where the PPEA were to dam a water source, village women first blocked the access road to project vehicles because they feared, wrongly, that they would have to pay for the drinking water when building was finished. Only then did project staff, who were certainly trying to act in the best interests of the population, hold sensitization meetings to explain the planned measure.

9. This is also an example of how two different development agencies, completely unco-ordinated, undertake two projects, at least one of which (cotton cultivation) has effectively caused damage to the target group of the other. In the cost-benefit calculations for the project concerned this aspect is not covered. On cotton cultivation in Bénin see Bierschenk (1987).

10. Similar tales are told by Krings (1985: 204f.) concerning the World Bank animal production project in the inner delta of the Niger, where wells intended for animals were used by farmers for new fields and settlements.

11. A demand of the Fulani délégué of Sinourarou on 31.8.1986. Instead the catchment basins tended to be made increasingly large (Bierschenk et al. 1986: 29).

12. Statement of a landlord in Natitingou in March 1986. The landlord concerned, a primary school teacher, lets five houses for an average rent of F CFA 50,000 to foreign experts.

13. Communication is therefore more difficult than it seems at first sight. Even the
meaning of water is not the same for everyone concerned. More than half of the PPEA project budget has been used for building catchment basins. Water is obviously a 'basic need' and corresponds, therefore, to the trend of today's development policy. In fact very different problems are subsumed under this heading. The Fulani of Pehonco were of the opinion that the dry season beginning prematurely endangered millet harvesting and thus the flexibility of their agropastoral mode of production. For other Fulani who mention 'lack of water' it is mainly a question of watering the young cattle towards the end of the dry season when most village wells dry up. For the Baatonu who, when asked, also called for an improvement to the water supply, it is mostly a question of drinking water for humans and washing water. The Bénin Government is mainly concerned with being seen to be doing something for the population, and dams are excellent objects for this. And the fact that everybody demands water assures the executing agency that it is reacting to 'felt needs'.

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