Chapter 11

Participatory Management of Tropical Dry Forests in Benin: Case Study From the “Trois Rivières” Forest, Borgou Region

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ABSTRACT

This chapter encompasses a literature survey and strategic analysis to understand the elaboration and implementation of Participatory Forest Management (PFM) in Benin, with a focus on the case of the “Forêt des Trois Rivières”. By analyzing the historical background of forest management systems in Benin, we highlighted two major turning points. The first relates to the creation and autocratic management of protected forests, which took place from 1940 to 1990. The second change took place after the Rio conference in 1992, and this emphasized the importance of local communities in natural resources management. Moreover, the results of our strategic analysis of stakeholders involved in the specific case of Participatory Forest Management Plan (PFMP) of the “Forêt des Trois Rivières” showed that it is important to emphasize on active community participation while designing a participatory management plan and for decision making at the implementation stage. We also observed that alliances between foresters and timber loggers are likely to hinder the achievement of the PFM objectives.

INTRODUCTION

Benin’s natural resources are increasingly threatened by human activities due to its growing demography. As a consequence, the creation, development and management of protected areas is one of the effective strategies for biodiversity conservation (Arouna & Djogbenou, 2006). According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and its World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), a protected area is “a clearly defined, recognized, dedicated and managed geographical area, by all effective means, legal or otherwise, to ensure the long-term conservation of nature and associated ecosystem services and cultural values”. In this respect, since the 1940s and 1950s, the colonial governments of Benin have listed and classified as protected areas all the forested massifs throughout the country. Today, Benin has protected forests covering National Parks (869,867 ha in total), Hunting Zones (443,679 ha), classified forests (1,292,543 ha), and Reforestation Perimeters. Outside these protected areas, Benin has a range of natural resources relevant to the agro-pastoral sector. These include rivers, grazing areas, wetlands, etc. However, drastic reduction of resources and climate change in the present time is crucial to amplifying competition between actors around natural resources, and this poses with acuity the need for governance systems that are well suited to the socio-economic context of the riparian populations who strongly depend on ecosystem services provided by natural resources.

The continuous degradation of natural resources in general and agro-forestry resources in particular are now at the centre of Benin’s major concerns. In order to counter this continuing degradation, the national forest policy has undergone profound regulatory changes since 1989 (MEPN, 2010). Earlier, order No. 4524 of 6 September 1949 established the “Trois Rivières” forest as a State Protected Forest. In 1994, a new Forest policy was adopted, which has the involvement of local riparian communities in natural resource management as a major innovation. These local riparian communities almost always include agro-pastoral communities whose livelihoods essentially depend on the exploitation of natural resources. The approach promoted by the new policy is to put all actors, including agro-pastoralists, in an organized and functional structure able to manage sustainably the available natural resources, called as participatory forest management. Despite this effort, natural resources continued to dwindle due to accelerated degradation and, paradoxically, there are disagreements between agro-pastoralists and foresters with consequences on the living conditions of the latter. Thus, we wondered about the reasons for the failure of participatory management plans to ensure better cohesion between stakeholders and effective sustainable resource management.

The initial answer to this question can be possibly found in the ideas of Crozier and Friedberg (1977), who postulated that actors in an organizational situation engage in games to defend their strategic interests. Accordingly, agro-pastoralists would perhaps find themselves in a game of actors from which they come out as a loser. Crozier and Friedberg define organized action as “the process through which the strategic interactions between a set of actors placed in a given policy area and mutually dependent for the solution of a number of common “problems” are stabilized and structured” (1995). According to Olaya and Ruess (2004), the previous approach is structured around four main axes: (1) a strategic actor (can be an individual, a group or any other collective entity) with its own interests and interactions with other actors who also act strategically; (2) a concrete system of action formed by interacting actors; (3) the game as an integration mechanism between the actor and the system where each actor has his own interests, but also the interest of keeping alive a concrete system of action; and (4) power as the capacity for action and consisting in an unbalanced exchange of possibilities for action (Crozier and Friedberg 1979, 1995). The approach proposed by Crozier and Friedberg which served as analytical framework of