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**QUESTIONS ABOUT EVALUATION METHODOLOGIES IN RURAL
DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS – Case studies from Guinea-Bissau and
Mozambique¹**

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ABSTRACT

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are major actors in rural development interventions in Africa. However evaluations of their activities seldom follow the same procedures as government-to-government projects. Self-evaluations using participatory methods, complemented by financial evaluations of the projects budgets by donors tend to be the rule.

In these case studies we show how evaluations fail to understand reality behind the scenarios created by development agents and the “hidden transcripts” used by peasants to protect themselves from outsiders.

To overcome this problem and introduce a general procedure in development evaluations we propose the use of socio-anthropological methods. The evaluations would be supported by the analyses of the organizational landscape in the target region and of the organizational culture of the implementing organization, and by the study of the target rural society’s perceptions, needs, potentials for self-organization and forms of resistance to undesired external interventions through an ethnographic approach with an actors-oriented perspective.

This will imply a coordination of efforts and a political will from the part of the donor agencies and of the recipient countries. The main result would be the creation of an international databank organized by recipient country of organizational landscapes and cultures, of former projects evaluations and of socio-anthropological and ethno-agronomic case studies of rural societies. Meta-analyses of this data would also permit the construction of a typology of organizational settings prone to failure or success of development interventions under given rural societies. That new approach would introduce a learning process on development evaluations and policy decision-making towards NGOs.

Key words: project evaluations, socio-anthropological methods, NGOs, African rural societies, policy decision-making.

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Introduction

Development aid is now characterized by a multitude of actors and projects where NGOs³ play a central role. However, standard methodologies are seldom applied to project evaluations.

Although almost a decade ago, Farrington & Bebbington (1994:209) mentioned the growing critics that "... NGOs rhetoric on participation exceeds reality. NGOs are self-appointed, rather than elected bodies, and control institutional resources from within", not much have been done to accurately evaluate their development interventions and above all to change the naïve attitude towards them.

In donor countries the NGOs lobby has been rather active in promoting the crystallization of the archetype image of this type of organizations as more accountable and cost effective than the state, less bureaucratic and with a loose central control, with a volunteer ethos, and prone to grass-roots action (Field-Juma, 1996:30; Cracknell, 2000:230)⁴. Donors also need to maintain the myth of the moral and operational superiority of NGOs in order to perpetuate the development machine.

NGOs have been pioneer in introducing a people-centred dimension in development, in which participatory methods of research and development became central. However, as Richards (1995:13-16) noted there still is a need for more "long-term comparative studies" and what we are observing is a "bureaucratisation" of participatory methods, which became a kind of "flag of necessity".

In the nineties, the NGO boom all over the world introduced heterogeneity in this type of organizations, and the initial ethos is now diluted in a huge sea. The movement towards the scaling up of these organizations and of their projects, both with their use as "non-profit contractors" (concept used in Sogge, 1997a) by aid agencies completely turned upside-down the initial characteristics of their interventions and even the ethos of that kind of organizations. Furthermore, northern NGOs, above all aid-NGOs, are becoming much more similar to consultancy bureaus. Therefore, we considered absolutely necessary for development actions and evaluations to start with a clear idea of the institutional origins and history of NGOs in each country.

Evaluation of NGOs interventions is for the reasons stated before, mainly ideologically driven. Cracknell (2000: 57, 281-5) tries to explain why self-evaluations⁵ – that obviously are not in tune with the accountability criterion – are the rule in NGO projects and programmes: evaluations rather expensive for small projects, the confidence of the individual contributors that finance part of their activities, general opinion about their volunteer ethos, the supposed use of participatory monitoring and evaluation techniques, and the fact that their projects and programmes often lack clearly stated objectives and criteria of success what makes evaluation rather difficult.

Anyway, what can be perceived and reported in a quick evaluation cannot reflect accurately the complex and diverse realities of people and organizations (governmental or non-governmental) that influence the results of any project and above all its sustainability. The concept of ownership and the stakeholder approach are transferring decision-making only to implementing organizations (governmental or civil society

³ - In this paper we use the concept of NGOs only referring to service organizations, and so not including membership organizations.

⁴ - Hanlon (1991:204) about these general assumptions states "NGO workers are all too often bumbling amateurs who go to Mozambique for a bit of adventure, to gain experience, and perhaps to further their careers. They frequently totally misunderstand local conditions, and are arrogant into the bargain. By contrast, bilateral and multilateral aid workers can be professionals who may respond more slowly, but make a more intelligent contribution, which has more long-term benefit. The professionals sometimes show more respect for local knowledge and expertise".

⁵ - Internal evaluations conducted by NGO local or head quarters staff.

ones), as, in practice, omission is made towards the power bias of direct beneficiaries (the deprived ones) of people-centred projects. Has any “Fourth generation evaluator” asked by whom and how have the direct beneficiaries representatives been chosen?

Cracknell (2000:271) pointed out “government works best in socio-cultural settings comprising many horizontal civic associations, that is settings where exists a ‘civic culture’”. The opposite seems to be also true, i.e., NGOs would be more democratic and accountable in countries where good governance is the rule.

Nonetheless, governmental and non-governmental organizations influence each other in the development “arenas”. NGOs often compete with each other for donors and clients, and collaboration and the search for a synergic action doesn’t seem common.

The organizational landscape is then the ‘ground’ where development takes place. An evaluator should then look beyond the project, contextualise it and try to understand the strategies of action of the different stakeholders that have influenced the course of the project.

Current socio-anthropological critics of development interventions are rather acute in demythologising planned intervention as something neutral (Long & van der Ploeg, 1989; Hobart, 1993), but on the contrary as “arenas” (Elwert & Bierschenk, 1988; Crehan & von Oppen, 1988; Bierschenk, 1988) where different interest groups fight for a stake.

We should never forget that, as Long & van der Ploeg (1989:235) defended, development intervention is “big business” even for NGOs, and so “the rules of the game called ‘evaluation’ are conditioned more by the social interests of those involved in manufacturing, promoting, selling and utilizing this particular commodity than by the functions it is assumed to fulfil in the intervention model”.

Projects can never be seen as independent events. Beneficiaries have a “historical imprint”, a kind of individual and collective memory of former projects, that much influences their attitudes towards each specific development intervention (Long & van der Ploeg, 1989:230).

Participatory methods often undermine the reasons people may have for not wishing to communicate and indeed for wanting to dissimulate – what Scott (1985) called the “weapons of the weak” - and so possibilities of cultural miss-communication are considerable. Socio-anthropological studies by their nature create a context where mutual confidence between researcher and researched is step by step acquired, and the rapport that close day-to-day living in communities creates makes possible a deeper level of understanding about people’s lives and the interface established with external interventions (including the researcher itself).

Participatory appraisals, given their intensive teamwork (not more than a week per village) and their research tools of visualization, transects, ranking, scoring and games, create a profound change in the daily life of peasants. It can be like a circus coming to a remote place.

The approach presented in this paper is the result of a long process of learning that began in 1993 with the research conducted on knowledge and institutional interfaces in rural development interventions by the first author in Guinea-Bissau (Temudo, 1998) and was since 1999 much further developed through intensive teamwork in Mozambique (2000 and 2001) and São Tomé and Príncipe (2002) within the project mentioned above.

Although many methodological steps and the length of the fieldwork have been different in these case studies there is a common approach linking them: the use of an actors-oriented perspective (see Long & Long, 1992), the analysis of the organizations

acting in a given region and in-depth case studies of the rural societies “modes of transformation”⁶.

Myths and Taboos of development intervention – a case study from Guinea-Bissau

“The honey they put in my ears doesn’t arrive to my mouth”
Statement by a local peasant about development interventions

Field research for this case study⁷ - a project intended to create a Natural Park named “Safeguard of the last sub-humid forests of Guinea-Bissau” - lasted from 1993 until 1996 (total of 22 months) and was after complemented with several short missions in 1999 (4 weeks), 2000 (6 weeks), 2001 (6 weeks) and 2002 (6 weeks) under the project mentioned above.

Living for a long time in the “development arena” we could daily observe and register several indicators of the organizational culture and of the results of the projects: external agents and peasants perceptions and attitudes towards each others, the management style of the organizations, the analysis of projects proposals and reports confronted with on-going routine activities, the conflicts between actors arising from the intervention process.

The research used a wide range of techniques from direct and participant observation to ECRIS. The “Enquête collective rapide d’identification des conflits et des groupes stratégiques” (ECRIS), created by Olivier de Sardan e Bierschenk (1994) and later developed by several authors (FAO, 1997), was conducted by the researcher alone – not by a team -, but following its basic assumptions and analytical indicators.

The identification of the strategic groups and of the conflicts created or increased by external interventions proved to be an important tool in assessing a project’ impact on the social fabric of a rural society.

After independence in 1975 a one-party regime with a centralized economy was established. Development interventions in rural societies were mainly conducted through integrated projects heavily financed by international aid. Until 1990 the foreign NGOs operating in Guinea-Bissau were compelled to work in close relation with the state (Rudebeck, 1996:36), who in 1984 created a governmental-non-governmental organization – the Solidami – to better control them.

From the beginning of the nineties, the structural adjustment measures and the adoption of a multi-party regime created the conditions for a NGO boom. This phenomenon was not specific of that country, though as Farrington *et al.* (1993:45) stated, “These adjustment related policy measures have not spared the professional middle class (specially civil servants), who have seen their wages decline rapidly and in some cases their jobs disappear. Some of this economically displaced middle class appears to have moved into, or created NGOs in search of new higher paying jobs. This strategy has been aided by the increased availability of donor funding, which facilitated

⁶ - Concept introduced by Elwert & Bierschenk (1988). The authors sustain the need to study historical processes of transformation of the so-called African “traditional societies” focusing on their structures of production and social reproduction mainly in situations of stress and/or change to better understand their behaviour in development interventions.

⁷ - In this paper we chose only one project. However, to a full understanding of development interfaces geared by external intervention after independence in Cubucaré region, see Temudo (1998). To avoid overcharging the text with too many references we are going to quote only this work, instead of all the grey literature that is mentioned there.

the creation of new NGOs. In some measure this has been an important element of the recent explosion of the NGO sector”.

Guinea-Bissau NGOs are frequently identified with one of their founding members that occupy the position of head officer, being common to hear: “The NGO of Mr ...” or “The NGO of Mrs ...”; something that shows a lot about their personalized and top-down organizational culture.

Coming into existence in a context of political liberalization, some of them assumed to be in opposition to the one-party regime (although some of their members had previous high positions in the state apparatus, and so the political trust of the PAIGC), what created frictions between NGOs and the state.

Guinea-Bissau NGOs are mostly what Meillassoux (quoted in Geffray, 1991:117) would call “social bodies” as they are organizations produced by a particular social class and whose only aim is their own reproduction.

In the Cubucaré region external interventions since 1977 have been mainly influenced by the activity of the Experimental Station of Caboxanque, one research centre of the Department of Agricultural Research (DEPA). Since 1978 and till 1991 the activities of this Station have been included in the Integrated Rural Development Project of Caboxanque (PIC), financed by several bi- and multi-lateral aid agencies and some international NGOs.

This agricultural station concentrated its activity in three main areas: research, rural extension and seed multiplication.

Mid-term evaluations were rather critical mainly about mismanagement, which left little money for project activities, the lack of engagement of the staff who were only oriented towards private-for-profit activities, the lack of sustainability of several activities (for instance peasant associations were considered not democratic and accountable). Not surprisingly peasants’ own perception was rather similar (Temudo: 1998:68-80).

In 1991, the local NGO Action for Development (AD) was founded by about forty members most of who were still public servants. Its director still was (and have been almost since its creation) the director of DEPA⁸, whose international network connections made possible to transfer some of the activities financed by Northern NGOs and some material resources of PIC to this new NGO. This competition for project resources and the fact that the AD director was affiliated to the ruling party’s opposition opened a conflict between the NGO and the State.

The project maintained the acronym and some of the activities: agriculture, health, support to peasant associations and training. Another project – for the support of peasant associations – financed by a Portuguese NGO was also transferred to AD. In peasants’ words, “DEPA brought forth to AD”.

In 1993, AD and two more local NGOs begin the implementation of a project aiming at the creation of a natural park in Cubucaré region. The activities of these three projects mutually overlapped and the new PIC was turned into a kind of umbrella with the other two projects duplicating the funding for some actions. For this reason any individual project evaluation would be rather difficult to conduct.

The main actors of the project “Safeguard of the last sub-humid forests of Guinea-Bissau” should be peasant associations – created by DEPA/AD – and the NGOs itself. Associations leaders created under external support were considered for all

⁸ - The DEPA, at that time, suffered a re-organization and changed the name to INPA. However, as a consequence of structural adjustment measures, its human and material resources had been reduced to a minimum with full consequences in its activities.

purposes to be the representatives of the projects' beneficiaries in a total disregard for traditional owners of the land.

Actual interventions, even the "participatory" ones, lie on "modernization theory" on the believe that traditional institutions are incapable of change and need to be substituted through social engineering by associations. The myth of the potential of peasants associations in the empowerment of rural societies is generalized in development cooperation. However, local organizations recently created by superimposition of the external agents are usually not able to function effectively, and just when the flow of aid money ceased they run into clearly visible difficulties and soon stop activities.

There are also plenty of taboos in development interventions as to traditional authorities and institutions and the cosmological sphere of African societies.

In the Cubucaré region, Islamic and Animist ethnic groups share the same regional cosmological paradigm by which the territory is inhabited by supernatural entities in many ways similar to humans. Its world is organized like a country with a kind of a president and several chiefs of territorial divisions; its army and its guards located in strategic points of the frontier with others spirits' territories.

Through contracts with the spirits, who are the true owners of the land, the heads of the founding lineages of the ethnic groups that first settle in Cubucaré – the Nalu – obtained the right to manage all the natural resources. This contract of transference of power must be periodically renewed by means of certain rituals conducted by the heads of the founding lineages at the spirits' shrines.

Access to land to settle and to work, to forest' products, to hunting and fishing are submitted to a request to the heads of the founding lineages and to the execution of certain rituals aiming to demand the spirits' agreement.

Each spirit's territory is divided into three distinct areas: a sacred wood, a buffer zone surrounding it and the land attributed to each village for inhabiting and agriculture. Access to sacred woods is strictly exclusive of the members of the founding lineage and no resource can be collected there. In the buffer zone, the access to resources is restricted by an environmental sound management system.

This local system of natural resources management has been maintained all over the years through a complex system of myths and taboos. Islamization of the Nalu ethnic group, the liberation war and the nationalization of land, and of all natural resources after independence, and lately the fear of the occupation of huge parcels of land by the urban elite have been major threats to its maintenance. Nevertheless, it was the NGOs project that perhaps most affected the heart of this traditional management system.

The strategy declared in the project proposal considers being compatible "repressive measures" (administrative and legislative) with the "full participation of the population in every stage of the project" (AD et al., 1992:28).

A full range of activities was proposed: credit lines for the rehabilitation of rice polders (*bolanhas salgadas*), increase the production of fruit orchards (mainly mango) and of valley-swamp rice (*bolanhas doces*) to reduce upland rice cultivation, support the creation of peasant associations, support traditional fishing, promote eco-tourism, support health services, conduct training, develop apiculture. Nonetheless, the project invested most of its budget in the construction of a local office and a house for the project coordinator (a rather young local technician), purchase of two four-wheel vehicles, forests biodiversity and boundaries of the natural reserves studies conducted by foreign researchers, and actions of information and sensitisation towards urban public opinion and donors in order to promote the image of the NGOs.

A system of personal networks and dependencies was established between the project personnel and some of the peasants⁹ chosen by their capacity to accept and reproduce the rhetoric of the NGO towards foreigners - be they evaluators, researchers or simple visitors. The other peasants call them the projects “jesters” (*djidios*).

In the conflict created by this project it was possible to identify different stakeholders and different sources of conflict:

- The Nalu ethnic group: having a secular system of natural resources management they did not feel the need of a project to tell them what to do; traditional land owners considered that NGOs and the direction of the main peasants association (AFC) bypassed them in the decision-making for the project approval and in the nomination of the forests guards that had been chosen between people of all ethnic groups¹⁰; the suspicion that the true aim (undeclared) of the external agents was to rob their spirits¹¹.
- The producers of upland rice considered that the project did not give them any training and/or material conditions to stop shifting cultivation, and that mango and valley swamp rice productions were not the solutions, above all because the price of rice increased a lot, there was no guaranty of an external market for mangoes, and valley swamp rice has several production constraints.
- The guards of the forests wanted to be paid a salary and to be given uniforms and credentials to have their authority recognized (mostly towards the state forests guards that were totally corrupt).
- Most of the local population: wanted the project coordinator to be substituted due to his lack of engagement in the work, the huge share his salary, and other amenities had in the project budget, and the arrogant attitude showed towards the peasants; complained about the reduced number of beneficiaries of the project activities; protested about the totally unfavourable credit conditions.

Another stakeholder suddenly appeared – the State – trying to instrumentalise peasants for its own benefit, i.e., to control the aid money for natural resources management. This was possible because in 1994 a huge conflict arose between the direction of AD and the direction of the AFC – the peasants association chosen to be the earmarked partner of the NGOs in all their interventions in Cubucaré. This conflict introduced a party-political dimension to the intervention arena.

All these conflicts lead to a peasant revolt in 1996 that slashed and burned land parcels to produce upland rice along the main roads (instead of 100 m inside), destroying the sceneries the NGOs would like to maintain for aid-donors visitors.

The increased desacralization of nature and de-legitimisation of traditional authorities were the main factors creating space for an ‘open-access’ to natural resources.

⁹ - Peasants believe that exists one only list of beneficiaries that spreads from one project/NGO to the others.

¹⁰ - Traditionally each sacred forest has someone nominated by the owner of the land to keep vigilance in order to control resources use. The nomination by the project of guards of all ethnic groups would seem rather democratic but it’s going to give outside power to people who do not have the same cosmological relation to the forests and whose objective is to maximize resource use.

¹¹ - This feeling was increased by the fact that external agents and scientists named by the project entered the sacred forests without any permission and without being accompanied by any representative of the lineage of the owner of the land. There is a generalized believe that every rich or famous person, every scientist and every powerful country have a spirit working for them, and that white people have the capacity to seduce the spirits to abandon their land and to go to live in the Occident where even they can be offered better living conditions.

The project ended in 1997 apparently because of problems between the three NGOs. Conflicts with beneficiaries were never detected (or valued?) by the mid-term external evaluation. Self-evaluations although “participatory” in rhetoric – meetings with representatives of the beneficiaries (named by the NGOs) – completely bypassed the general population critics, who was considered a group of hypocritical opportunists not grateful for the project common benefits.

This project opened fissures in the still fragile system of myths and taboos that maintained the traditional management of natural resources by the suspicion that the NGOs personnel and the project researchers robbed some of the spirits owners of the land. Land conflicts grew in number and intensity, opening space for the “tragedy of the commons”.

These inter-ethnic cleavages and tensions came to their climax after the post-civil war elections that gave the power to a party organized in ethnic lines. The Balanta ethnic group has now a full control of the state apparatus, which geared at a regional level the breakdown of the equilibrium of the inter-ethnic relations of power with huge consequences in the management of natural resources. Land occupations by the Balanta run now unchecked, as magic protections of forests can't be activated (Temudo & Schiefer, 2001).

This detailed case study mainly intends to illustrate how important for development interventions and evaluations are socio-anthropological data and methods of research, because only with their help we can capture the entire fabric of social relations that determines a project course.

When reality doesn't count – a case study from Mozambique

Field research was conducted in Cuamba and Maúa districts of the Niassa province – the most forgotten one - of Mozambique from June until September 2001.

The second author mainly conducted the characterization of the organizational landscape, although the conception of semi-structured interviews guidelines was in part the result of teamwork. Guidelines focused in three main areas: the characterization of each organization, the characterization of their interventions, and the characterization of the articulation with donors funding politics and with the others implementing organizations (governmental and non-governmental).

Thirty interviews were conducted to present or previous officers of the organizations in study, which included seven international NGOs¹², four national NGOs and one membership organization¹³ with their offices in the Cuamba city, the administration of the Faculty of Agronomy, the Cuamba and Maúa district administrators, and the Cuamba head officer of the European Union. Local state departments of agriculture were almost inactive and so it was impossible to find someone available to be interviewed.

Field visits to projects areas accompanying routine staff activities and also taking a glance at their relationship with beneficiaries were part of the research procedures when this was accepted by the organizations. Staff attitude towards our

¹² - OXFAM GB; Medical Care Development International (MCDI); PSI-Health Communication and Social Marketing; Sweden African Group (GAS), Laical for Development; World Relief; German Agro Action (Deutsche Welthungerhilfe).

¹³ - AMODER; Associação para o Desenvolvimento da Comunidade (ADC); Ajuda do Povo para o Povo -Vestuário (ADPP); Acção Cristã Interdemoninacional de Saúde (ACRIS); União dos Agricultores do Sul do Niassa (UCASN).

participation in their normal work, towards our formal interview and in making reports accessible was considered one – but not the sole – good indicator of the organizational culture. Analyses of the projects proposals and reports were continuously confronted with field observations of results.

The first author conducted case studies of the agrarian societies in two territories (traditional chieftaincies) – Mitukue and Konhomali - located respectively in Cuamba and Maúá districts in order to study their “modes of transformation” as a result of civil war and external intervention. In the study of the livelihood systems, semi-structured interviews were conducted in 48 households (Ethokos) in Konhomali (out of a total of 270) and 106 households in Mitukue (out of a total of 964).

Both research lines were constantly nurtured by the information each author obtained creating a synergic action.

Liberation war in Mozambique began in 1964 and lasted until 1974. With independence in 1975, Frelimo established a one party regime, nationalized the economy and initiate a socialization process of the countryside with many consequences in peasants’ food security. All these factors led to a disenchantment of the peasants whose support to Frelimo was, according to Geffray (1991), much more based on an anti-colonial feeling than on an understanding and adherence to its socialist project.

Renamo – a party created by the Rhodesian secret service – conducted a civil war since 1977 until 1992. In the Niassa province this war began only in 1983 in the Maúá district.

Since the mid-eighties donors began to channel growing shares of aid through NGOs, whose intervention at that time was directly or indirectly related to the war (Hanlon, 1997:31). Until the beginning of the nineties only three Mozambican NGOs were relevant: the Christian Council of Mozambique, the Caritas-Mozambique, and the Red-Cross of Mozambique (Sogge, 1997b:64).

After the signature of the peace accord, in 1992, the funding of aid-NGOs increased. Donors’ pressing to work through local partners has been a major cause of the local NGOs plethora (Hanlon, 1997:31).

Sogge states that “religious congregations are the major category in Mozambique civil society, and possibly the most loyal and coherent one” (1997b:74), although doubting presently about the relevance of the concept of civil society in this country (1997b:48).

In the Northern provinces of Mozambique, the main ethnic group is the Macua, one of the most representative within the country.

Maize is the main agricultural production in this province and most of the inquired producers have a surplus that in some cases lasts for 2 to 3 years given to market constraints. After slash and burn mixed cropping is practised in upland fields (*machambas*) till complete exhaustion of the soil and then abandoned. Sunflower, groundnuts, beans, pigeon pea and sesame may be sold to satisfy some basic needs such as soap, salt and cloth and to pay taxes, school fees and medical treatments.

The production of vegetables and fruit (specially bananas) are mainly oriented to the market, being a guaranteed source of cash income. The development of these activities is prevented mainly by lack of propagation materials but also by shortage of appropriate fields.

Tobacco and cotton (a colonial forced-crop) are produced as cash crops. Now the quasi-monopolistic position of some enterprises (like J.F.S. in Niassa) is allowing dishonest trading practices and peasants’ profits are rather low or null.

Prices are rather unstable and producers are often unable to take advantage of seasonal price adjustments by holding on their surpluses, due to a pressing need for cash, the potential for losses during storage or because traders do not come regularly.

In fact the lack of traders means that smallholders have little choice over the timing and the price of their sales. Access to market or to itinerant traders seems to be the crucial issues impacting on incomes and traded volumes. However, most families are completely isolated, and their access to tertiary roads is done through trails, where in most cases not even bicycles are able to pass.

Pre and post-harvest losses are felt as major constraints. Marketing and road infrastructures are further bottlenecks.

Colonial intervention in rural societies, mainly by forced integration in the market economy through the production of cash crops, the socialization process after independence and the long war (anti-colonial and civil) generated a desaggregation process of the social fabric of the society.

Intra-extended family (*Ebumba*) relations of solidarity and reciprocity were weakened by the growing individualization of the nuclear families.

Since the end of the war, the number of single and divorced women with little children has been growing, supposedly because of the fewer number of men - that were killed during the armed conflict - and because of their social decline of responsibility towards women and their own children. General statements both by men and women also indicate a growing process of young women "hidden" prostitution that is conducting to a decline in the number of marriages and increasing divorces. Informal polygamic volatile relations are proliferating without the institutional framework that could protect women. Middle-aged and old women accuse young women of catching their husbands' savings, which should be oriented towards household needs. This process is getting worse near cities.

Mutual aid, that traditionally occurred between the several nuclear families (*ethokos*) of the same *Ebumba*, seldom occur actually and so senior families are facing the same problems.

The poorest have smaller cropped areas located in unfertile soils - because of a lack of capacity to open new fields - and their houses and granaries are in a bad condition. This group of people is constituted mainly by alcoholics and by single, divorced or widow women with small children and old people that have no help from their families. Nevertheless, civil status and age are not clear-cut indicators of poverty; because there are very active, enterprising and hard workingwomen and old people who have a high living standard for local conditions. Some young and middle-aged couples suffering from chronic hunger are considered lazy by their neighbours, which can be assessed by the number of hours/day they work in the fields.

If war clearly contributed to the breakdown of social organization and to the erosion of social capital, Macua society has also shown a remarkable capacity for reconstruction and reconstitution. Our research revealed that although the seed system was affected by civil war, few years after it ended peasants were in general able to replace their stocks of traditional seed varieties through buying, gifts by family and friends and exchange of work by seeds¹⁴ - seed distribution during relief and emergency intervention were not considered relevant¹⁵. Three to five years after the peace accord

¹⁴ - The capacity to keep or rapidly replace the stock of germplasm of seeds of local varieties is considered an important indicator of the capacity for reconstruction and reconstitution of African agrarian societies (Temudo & Schiefer, 2001).

¹⁵ According to the first Oxfam GB Niassa head officer, seed distribution during emergency and relief interventions was stopped because it was inducing imbalances in peasants' survival strategies, and

peasants began to believe that the war was over, and felt confident to make long-term investments such as building better houses (with mud bricks instead of bamboo plastered with mud) and planting orchards.

In Niassa province, external interventions by the state and by local and international NGOs seem to have been designed without any knowledge of the social organization and of the farming and livelihood systems of agrarian societies. Recently some baseline studies have been conducted by two NGOs with participatory techniques (ACRIS, 2001; Valente, 2001). However, several key questions have been bypassed.

Our first surprise came when we realize the total ignorance about peasants' culture, social organization and livelihood systems of high-level NGOs staff (either agronomists and sociologists, Mozambican or foreigners), some of which professors at the Faculty of Agronomy in Cuamba and working in the province for a long time. The work of the anthropologist Christian Geffray, although published in Mozambique, was totally ignored. So only blueprint projects – that could have been designed outside the country – implemented with a blueprint approach were conducted.

In general base-level project personnel was the only to contact regularly with the peasants and there was a tendency to look down on fieldwork. So it was not surprising to observe the astonishment of the high-qualified NGO personnel by the fact that the first author went to live with the peasants.

Niassa is the biggest province of the country¹⁶ – about 129 000 km² – but has a rather low population density. The majority of both local and international NGOs have their offices in the two main cities – Cuamba and Lichinga. However, many of them spread their activity by too many districts, increasing the difficulties of monitoring and evaluation and the implementation costs, not to say that sometimes it seems impossible to implement anything at all given the condition of the trails and the huge area attributed to each NGOs field worker. In spite of the bad road infrastructures being a constraint to rural societies endogenous and exogenous development, few interventions have been oriented to that.

Another feature of intervention is its concentration in the better-off districts.

Nowadays, the development scene is completely determined by the political bipolarization that civil war brought into Mozambican society. Although Renamo party has won the elections in the Northern provinces, representatives of the ruling party - the Frelimo - govern local state administrations. So the province and district administrators put a lot of pressure to de-motivate NGOs of working with the “quarrelsome people” (*conflituosos*). Furthermore, they speak about projects' outputs as they had been implemented by the state, and for that reason Renamo peasants also accuse some NGOs of being of Frelimo. So NGOs are under a political crossed fire.

After the civil war, external intervention have been mainly oriented towards the: *i*) distribution of seeds, *ii*) credit to small and mid-sized tradesmen, *iii*) support of commercialisation activities through the creation of peasant' associations, and *iv*) resettlement of goats through peasant's credit in animals.

Our research revealed huge staff mobility and an absence of descriptive and evaluative documents about activities previously performed leading to the lack of an organizational memory, which compromise a learning organizational culture. No strategic planning was observed in any organization. Moreover, the overlapping of the

inequalities among them. Oxfam staff discovered that peasants were eating improved seeds while keeping their own, and that some were hidden their production below their granaries.

¹⁶ - For a comparative idea, Guinea-Bissau has an area of about 36 000 km², and the Cubucaré region 1000 km².

NGOs intervention makes almost impossible to evaluate the outcomes and outputs of the different projects.

Even when NGOs have their projects designed through a log frame, and so objectives, results and means are clearly stated from the beginning, there is no baseline information to prove that the objectives were too ambitious, numerical results were impossible to prove, and some key questions were completely bypassed. Let's give an example using the Oxfam¹⁷ "Food security livelihoods" programme (Yates, 2000):

- "By the year 2002, at least 50% of poor people within the districts of Maúa and Metarica will have achieved fundamental food security ..." (p.3). However nobody knows how many families do not attain self-sufficiency, the reasons that justify that phenomenon, and if the organization has resources (mainly human) to address the problem¹⁸;
- To achieve this objective, "By the year 2002, production per hectare by the programme target group has risen at least 15-20% for maize, and 30% for sorghum, groundnuts and sunflower..." (p.3). This should be attained by the use of improved seeds and techniques (mainly sowing in rows) of production. However, improved varieties of these cereals have rather poor storage characteristics, and so are usually oriented towards market and immediate consumption, and peasants only store the seeds. This means that peasants have a real problem if they have a surplus and no conditions to sell it. Relating to groundnuts, in the studied chieftaincy of Konhomali these seeds were distributed without any lasting impact because field pests prevent its production. With sunflower the problem was worse as Oxfam bought seeds to Care NGO, which had a low germination power and four varieties with different growing cycles were mixed together.

No efforts have been made by any organization to support peasants' initiative of increasing and diversifying fruit production with appropriate planting materials, and to give them training for the adoption of improved propagation techniques like grafting and pruning.

Although in the neighbour province of Nampula some international NGOs (like Care and World Vision) are working on integrated protection of stored products, in Niassa no external efforts have been made to generate basic knowledge on local post-harvest management and of potentials, constraints and opportunities for their improvement. So it seems that the most criticized approach of increasing availability in agricultural foodstuffs by raising production area and by the introduction of improved varieties (in general more susceptible to pests), instead of an intervention in the reduction in pre and post-harvest losses is still in move in development cooperation¹⁹.

For the poor people of Niassa province, food security is much dependent upon the existence of a stock of dried cassava to face the pre-harvest period of food shortage. As we stated before, dried cassava is the most susceptible product to storage pests.

¹⁷ - In this paper, Oxfam was chosen in examples, giving the fact that it is a rather well known Northern NGO, and not because its interventions or behaviour culture are worse than others organizations, which are certainly not.

¹⁸ - The social problems of women, old people and alcoholics are so complex that no standard intervention can solve them.

¹⁹ - Oxfam GB – Niassa Office intended to have an intervention in the reduction of pre-harvest pests. However the difficulties inherent to the control of big pests like elephants, monkeys and wild pigs made the organization to quit the idea (Oxfam, 2000:7,17).

Nevertheless, interventions directed to improve food security of the most deprived did not consider storage management as a major component of the project design²⁰.

In relation to the support to commercialisation through credit given to small and mid-sized tradesmen, NGOs succumbed to the huge pressures from governmental officials to include their wives and friends in the beneficiary group.

NGOs helped peasants associations to link directly to the big traders with whom they establish a contract of supplying a certain quantity of a given product (mainly maize and beans) at a given price. Nonetheless, the price is decided before harvest when the peasants have no means to predict market demand and possible maximum prices, but on the contrary the trader has full access to that information. So, if in bad market years these contracts do help peasants, when prices are high they can lose a lot of money. Moreover, no intervention had been made to help peasants to establish better contracts with the enterprise J.F.S. for the production of cotton and tobacco.

External interventions showed no concern about environmental sustainability. Although the goat resettlement program was built on a traditional credit practice between peasants (*Ovala*), it is bypassing some ecological considerations of goat breeding which are overemphasized by traditional cropping systems. However no external organization has ever planned to complement that programme with participatory on-farm research for the introduction of alley farming with multi-purpose legumes. In addition the superimposed obligation of building a corral as the only measure to avoid the destruction of crops by goats is more a scenario than an effective action. So, conflicts between peasants' are common, as goats affect food security.

Fifty percent of the NGOs with offices in Cuamba are or were directly or indirectly financed by the EU, whose conditions are shaping the organizational landscape forcing partnerships and the creation of Mozambican organizations.

In general NGOs staff had a rather high salary compared to the local standard of living, which reduced the share available for activities with beneficiaries, created an artificial middle-class, and caused inflation in prices.

Some of the organizations refused to be interviewed, to facilitate project documents and evaluations, and to allow our presence in fieldwork. This could be considered a sign of lack of accountability. Signs of present or previous corruptions were also detected in some organizations²¹. To call someone "racist" can be used as a magic bullet against any foreigner – be an evaluator, a researcher or even a NGO staff member²² - who tries to introduce more accountable procedures.

In sum, external intervention may be characterized by a piecemeal approach to development lacking overall coherence, duplicating efforts and, in practice, completely bypassing rural societies most urgent needs.

²⁰ - See, Oxfam GB – Niassa programme plan on food security and livelihoods for 2000-2003 (Oxfam, 2000) funded by EU.

²¹ - An example: Oxfam intervention in the Nipepe district suddenly stopped during cholera epidemic, because peasants accused external agents of Oxfam and MCDI (which were disinfecting wells) of spreading it. However, our research concluded that this attitude was a "weapon of the weak" against external agents behaviour. In fact, the first Oxfam head officer considered his salary too low and so decided to complement it with an agricultural enterprise using the organization machinery. Field workers then felt at ease to increase their profits through buying precious stones to Nipepe peasants and using the organization vehicles to transport goods to sell to them, making a disloyal competition with local tradesmen.

²² - In Guinea-Bissau, the first author was called "racist" by the NGO staff, when she tried to discuss the problems arisen by their interface with peasants, and only the support of these ones made possible to went on doing research. In Mozambique, a former Oxfam GB Niassa head officer tried to define tasks for any employee and working rules to combat absenteeism and was accused of racism and then dismissed after a internal inquire.

This particular case study intends to show how important it is to cross analyse the organizational landscape and rural societies “modes of transformation” to fully understand the development intervention culture and its impact.

Conclusions

In recent years, a lot of effort is being put on developing participatory methods of designing, planning, implementing and evaluating development projects. The height of hypocrisy is that we all know that most African governments are not accountable, local NGOs are mostly emanated from the urban elites and so do not represent the poor or their interests, and northern aid-NGOs are becoming enterprises. On that context we would say as Hobart (1995:10) that “... the postulated growth of knowledge concomitantly entails the possibility of increasing ignorance”.

The study of the organizational landscape throws a great deal of light on significant socio-cultural, organizational and political factors that directly affect interventions. Simultaneously the understanding of rural societies “modes of transformation” can be an effective tool for the self-help and empowering approach in development interventions.

The construction of a data base – of organizational landscapes, all data about projects, and rural societies ‘modes of transformation’- continuously updated can introduce an eclectic, flexible and adaptive methodological procedure and a freely sharing of information between all partners involved in development aid and research, making compatible the accountability and lesson-learning objectives of projects evaluation, and above all increase development effectiveness, and reduce the perverse effects of intervention on rural societies. Two conditions are needed:

- . A coordination of efforts and a political will from the part of the donor agencies and of the recipient countries;

- . A more closed rapport between research and intervention, and the end of the eternal mistrust between academics and development agents.

Meta-analyses of the data bases can be also an important tool for the construction of a typology of organizational settings prone to failure or success of development interventions under given rural societies, and also for the creation of an early warning system (see Atteslander, 1995) to detect latent social conflicts and intervene in destabilized societies facing a process of anomie.

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