



**From “better representation” to subordination in participatory forest  
management in Senegal**

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## **Abstract**

Senegal's democratic decentralization reform dates to 1996. Rural communes gained the right to define local policies over nine domains of power including natural resources management and environment. In 1998, decentralization reform spanned the forest sector with the promulgation of the so-called 'decentralizing code'. Both laws recognized the communes as the rightful institution to organize the political economy of commercial forestry resources, mainly wood and charcoal. However, the forestry code imposed the establishment of forest management plans as a pre-condition for the transfer of the power over communal forests to be effective. To expand forest management plans throughout the forestry regions, Senegal's government called upon donors to finance some management projects. One of the largest projects, however, decided to 'depoliticize' the sector for better representation of village interests, creating village-based institutions. These participatory institutions, because of the Forest Service's technical claims over forestry decision-makings, ended up being subordinate to the forest service offices and to the project as far as charcoal is concerned. Forest Department services and a World Bank-funded participatory forestry project staffs have made the committees leaders dependent on them through the allocation of undue privileges allocated through mechanisms such as permits and quota to market charcoal in the cities. These local elites, now dependent on the forest service, also have their own dependents to whom they also reallocate privileges. These networks of dependency have constrained the consolidation of local (democratic) representation – since allocation bypasses the democratic process. Patronage developed, maintained and expanded subordination which replaced the promised "better representation". This communication draws from data collected in Eastern Senegal over eleven years of either of both short- and long- term fieldworks.

**Key words:** representation, participation, decentralized forestry, subordination, Senegal.

## Introduction

‘Institutional choice’ is the act by which external intervening agencies such as projects, NGOs, donors, and state or administrative bodies opt to partner with one or another existing or created institution during their interventions (Ribot *et al.* 2008). When an institution is chosen, it is ‘recognized’. Here, ‘recognition’ occurs through the delegation of powers and resources by intervening agencies to the chosen or newly created institutions (Ribot *et al.* 2008). Herein, I use ‘recognition’ in Ribot’s institutional sense, which is different from the recognition of groups or identities as discussed by Taylor (1994), Frazer (1996) and Honneth (1996). When, through institutional choice, public powers and resources are transferred to non-elected actors rather than to those who have been democratically elected to manage public resources, the result is deconcentration or privatization, which weakens elected local authorities (Ribot *et al.* 2006) without necessarily empowering the non-elected local institutions the project intervention chose to partner with.

This paper shows how the implementation of the decision of a World Bank-funded project - known as PROGEDE - to circumvent the political-party-based elected local authorities has neither supported participation nor democratic representation, say representative democracy. The circumvention of the elected local authorities in favor of the new village-based committees that PROGEDE has created lies on the *technical claims* innovated, developed and maintained by the Forest Department during the management process. By ‘technical claims’ refer to any regulations and other actions (including the production of narratives about forestry) being used during project implementation in the name of technical correctness as a condition for sustainable forest management and exploitation. ‘Technical claims’ involve the whole ensemble of technical rules inscribed in the Forest Management Plans (FMPs) by forestry agents and experts to shape forest conservation, production (of charcoal in particular) and management of the revenues that flow from decentralized forestry under PROGEDE. (Faye 2014, 2015).

In this respect, technical claims are a set of actions, norms and narratives tucked away in the strategies of domination (Poteete and Ribot 2011), especially in contexts where the ecological ‘additionalities’ of the FMPs that support them are challenged. Indeed, Wurster (2010) has also shown that FMPs do not have an ecological consequence: managed and non-managed forestry areas are ecologically identical. Therefore, the plans are more about domination and an “imagination of deforestation” that support it in the name of science (1999b, 2014). Because the technically-based FMPs aimed at gaining formal and material backing from PROGEDE issued from the Forest Department in the name of science and technical expertise, the technical claims have served to kick away the elected local authorities and have made the committees subordinate to the forest agents as far as decisions about charcoal are concerned.

The technical claims promote subordination which constrain the possibility of diverse viewpoints regarding norms and regulations, excluding the potentials of other actors to speak, think and act (Landwehr 2006 cited by Winkel 2011: 2). Therefore, subordination is opposite to representation, which would ensure the existence of contradicting debates that would enable any group of actors voice itself and participate democratically the

formation and the consolidation of (representative) democracy.

The choosing or creating of institutions by management project interventions structures representation and power distribution at the rural level. Indeed, the circumvention of the elected local authorities by project interventions deprives them from the material resources required for an institution to be responsive. Although local governments are not automatically responsive when they do have material resources (Ribot 2004a, 2004b), the ability of non-elected actors to respond more effectively than elected actors can discredit those elected authorities (who via election have a formal obligation to be responsive and accountable to their constituents). As Ribot (2009: 106) wrote “the empowerment of the elected councils therefore should set the conditions under which effective and legitimate democratic local authority might emerge”.

Representation matters since it is basic condition to the social protection needed for poor (Ribot 2014). In the current context of a globalizing rise for land and forestry resources ownership and control, which translates into carbon financing projects and REDD+ pilot interventions in developing countries, accountability and responsiveness of decision-makers (democratic representation) should be a right to ensure the social security of the poor in relation to natural resource management.

PROGEDE intervention have redistributed the public powers over commercial resources, charcoal in particular. Indeed, the elected local governments have been disempowered while the committees that would replace them in the name of ‘depolitization’ (*a la* Ferguson 1994) have ended up being subordinate to the forest agents and the staff of PROGEDE. The rationale for this power redistribution draws upon technical claims, which are inscribed in the Forest Management Plans (FMPs) and disseminated in the implementation of them. The maintenance of the new power distribution called upon the building of networks of dependents, which are consolidated by the forest agents and PROGEDE staff through the allocation and reallocation of undue privileges to those who support their views and secure their positions. Through those processes, subordination is maintained in Senegal’s participatory forest management rather the promised better representation and empowerment, which has come to be either an ‘utopia’ (Nuesiri 2014) or ‘an illusion’ (Chomba et al. 2015).

The rest of the paper consists of five sections. The following, Section 2, presents the research sites and methods. Section 3 presents an overview of forest decentralization in Senegal and delineates the case study. Section 4 analyzes the imposition of technical claims and how they served to disempower local governments in PROGEDE’s first phase. Section 5 portrays the new participatory organizational structure made in PROGEDE’s second phase and how they were used to institutionalize subordination and neutralize democratic representation in Senegal’s forest governance. Finally, Section 6 discusses the results and draws out the ecological and practical implications of this game of ‘recognition’ for theories of development and democracy.

## 2. Sites and Methods

The empirical work for this paper was mainly conducted in a rural jurisdiction I refer to as *Wulli*, in the Eastern administrative region of Tambacounda, at almost 500 kilometers from the Senegal's capital, Dakar. Tambacounda is one of the administrative regions of Senegal in which charcoal has long been produced; this region was therefore of particular interest to PROGEDE,<sup>i</sup> since their goal was to encourage local production and marketing of charcoal, to: (1) enhance rural people's contribution to the national energy supply and (2) alleviate rural poverty. In order to gain a more robust understanding of certain issues, the research extended to three other rural jurisdictions in the Tambacounda region, where the project also intervened. These jurisdictions are home to a majority of Fula and Mandinka (mostly Jakhanke and Soninke) people. In commercial forestry, as this paper will show, the charcoal sector in particular is highly politicized. Therefore, to protect my informants and host communities, I use pseudonyms when referring to both actors and locations.

The research took place over a total of approximately 15 months over 2012-2014. These more intensive fieldwork periods were facilitated by 10 months of previous fieldwork in 2004 and 2005, and several weeks 2008 and 2011. The methods used were mixed but mainly qualitative, using open and semi-structured interviews as well as informal discussions and the collection of biographies. Participant observation took place as I became involved in charcoal activities, project events and daily village life. Where interviewees agreed, I recorded discussions; if not, I took notes. To put my informants at ease, I did not record if the subject was sensitive or if I observed that an informant was fearful of speaking, especially during informal discussions in the villages where I was residing and engaging in participant observation.

I adopted the technique of 'studying through' (Wright and Reinhold 2011), which entails Nader's (1972) 'studying up' - interviewing high-level authorities at the national level - and 'studying down' - interviewing local-level actors. Interviewing back and forth between national and local actors served to unveil the discursive consonances and contradictions in the ways that interviewees rationalized both policy and practice. To explain the underlying ideologies, I draw from the New Institutionalism approach in social anthropology (see Ensminger 1992) to analyze how concepts like 'sustainability,' 'regular charcoal supply' and so on have: (1) enabled the recourse to technical claims, and (2) consequently legitimized the practice of subordination rather than representation.

## 3. Overview of forest decentralization and Case study

This section presents an overview of decentralization and its application in the forest sector. It also presents the case study.

### 3.1 Forest Decentralization overview

In Senegal, since 1996, important public powers have been legally transferred from the State to three levels of local political entities, the Rural Community (RC)<sup>ii</sup> – the lowest local government. In this paper, Rural Council refers to the political body that governs the jurisdiction called the Rural Community<sup>iii</sup>. It has a Council which is composed of at

least 27 elected members (forming the deliberative body) who in turn elect an executive organ composed of a president (the PCR) and two vice-presidents.

By instantiating the formation of Rural Communities as the most local political jurisdiction, the 1996 decentralization reform called for local representative democracy. Indeed, the members of the Rural Council, referred to as rural councilors were meant to politically represent the people within the villages they come from. Candidates to local elections are selected by party politics or civil society associations. Independent candidacy is not yet allowed but is nourishing an endless debate between politicians, intellectuals and civil society organizations in Senegal. The representative democracy aim of the reform has been made clear in the preamble of the Law No. 96-27 that assigned the Rural Councils the twofold objective of promoting (1) local democracy and (2) local development in the lead of its executive or operational body: the PCR and two-vice PCRs.

With donors' support, the government of Senegal designed environmental projects to help the newly created local governments oversee decentralization in the forest sector. Non-gazetted forests within the jurisdiction of each RC are designated as "community forests" (law No. 98-03). Although the legal transfer of powers was made through the General Code of Decentralization in 1996 (laws No. 96-27 and No. 96-1134), the Forest Code of 1998 states that the 1996 Code is only effective when a FMP is established. The FMP requires technical knowledge, over which forestry agents claim a monopoly. However, the government of Senegal says that it cannot afford a FPM (whose minimal cost is at least \$40,000 US) for each rural jurisdiction. The need for such a plan, combined with the lack of resources on the part of the central government, opened up a space for donors to save the day, funding the forest management projects that would expand FMPs.

### **3.2 Case study**

Officially launched in 1997 but effectively starting in 1998 with multiple donor funding led by the World Bank, PROGEDE was devised by the Forest Department and the Energy Directorate. PROGEDE seeks to promote local representation and sustainable forest management by encouraging local communities to produce charcoal for use by urban populations, in Dakar in particular. PROGEDE had two official phases: PROGEDE I, which ran from 1998 to 2008 (with an extension to 2008 approved in 2005), and PROGEDE II, which ran from 2011 to 2015<sup>iv</sup>. There were widespread calls for the elaboration and implementation of FMPs during PROGEDE-I and II. PROGEDE I and II were, however, separated by what I call an intermediary period, or 'inter-phase,' from 2009 to 2010, when project activity temporarily ceased.

Crafted with the technical knowledge of Senegal's National Forest Department, each FMP is composed of documents listing identified resource uses in space and time; technical prescriptions about resource access, especially for charcoal production; distributional rules on power and benefits; and plans for the expenditure of funds. These regulations are called the "Technical Prescriptions" of the FMP. My reference to 'technical

claims' throughout this paper includes these regulations. After more than fifteen years of PROGEDE intervention, this study seeks to assess project outcomes, highlighting the politics of recognition and viewed against triumphant claims of successful decentralization in Senegal as compared to other West African Francophone countries.

#### **4. PROGEDE-I: recognizing and subordinating committees through technical claims**

This section demonstrates the Forest Service's mobilization of technical claims as it went about crafting and recognizing new authorities in Phase I. The Forest Department made community leaders accountable and subordinate to itself - thus, despite forest decentralization laws, rejecting the representative democracy assigned to Senegal's decentralization reform.

##### **4.1 The reification of technique in participatory forest management**

1998 marked the beginning of Phase I of PROGEDE. It is the date of the promulgation of the so-called 'decentralizing' forestry code that would enable the transfer of power over forest to the party-based elected authorities that politically represent rural people in community forests. However, the reification of technical claims and the discursive that surrounds them will break this politically progressive promise.

PROGEDE was headquartered at the National Forest Department and led by forestry officials at the national and regional stations. PROGEDE was, in others words, a state actor, different in name only from the Forest Department; in practice, PROGEDE and the Forest Department were a single entity. The project initiated the development of FMPs, outlining a series of technical prescriptions to guarantee sustainable and 'rational' exploitation of charcoal while maintaining supply to the cities. Among these prescriptions is the rule of 50%, which imposes the cutting of no more than half of the potential tree population in a given parcel. Another technical measure is the zoning of the forest into 'forest blocks', which are further zoned into, parcels or plots. Charcoal production is based on an eight-year parcel rotation to favor natural regeneration. Another rule makes only *combretum* trees (bush willows) with a minimal diameter of 10 cm exploitable. Further, the project called for the substitution of the traditional kiln with the "Casamance kiln," and the creation of firebreaks in order to combat bushfires. Through these technical prescriptions, forestry agents legitimized the imposition of new institutional arrangements and the fabrication of new forest authorities.

My interviews aimed to uncover the rationale of forestry agents and project officials for forming village-based organizations that ran in parallel to the previously existing democratic institutions. The then Director of Forest Management and Production defended the idea that none of the Rural Council members and Forest Department staff would be available to implement the FMPs' technical prescriptions. For that job, he reasoned, village organizations were needed. This argument - that locally elected institutions were incapable of implementing FMPs - was a leitmotif in interviews with high-ranking officials and experts.

It is instructive to note that the domination of local people and resources by national Forest Departments or forestry agents is a longstanding condition, one that existed in France long before its imposition in West Africa by colonial powers. Even under the French kings, forestry agents ‘technosized’ forest management issues to ensure the meeting of the kingdoms’ needs and to legitimize the (even) then strict forest surveillance (Boutinot 2003; Blundo 2011). Technical claims have historically guided forest management; indeed, Bergeret’s 1995 paper tellingly described such policies as transferred to the colonies “endlessly self-perpetuating” (see also Ribot 2001a).

The initiator of the first set of village-based committees in the forest sector affirmed that current organizational forms drew from his own Gambian experiences on bushfire-prevention committees. As a temporarily assigned forestry agent who headed the 1996-97 forest management pilot project (*schéma pilote d’aménagement des forêts*) funded by the National French Cooperation Bureau, this forestry agent organized an exchange visit to The Gambia. The idea was to create organizations that could transfer the power to manage land from Rural Councils to villagers, making that management directly profitable to the village people.

(...). In fact, the State has transferred the management power to the Rural Council but we [the project and forestry agents] wanted villages to profit from that transfer directly. (...). You can see that projects have developed what I have initiated [he said proudly]. I am the one who invented the committees. We called them Village Development Committees. If somebody has told you another story, he lied (Interview with *Lebu Gui*, July 6, 2012).

The research outlined here highlights the stigmatization of local elected authorities by project staff and forestry agents. Local authorities were said to work not on behalf of their constituents but in their own interests, and those of the political parties that support them. This interview extract also shows that the project’s promoters, mainly forestry agents, used the stigmatization of local authorities to convince people that the project aimed to benefit the people in ways local authorities could not. This was particularly important in sites like Wulli, where local people disliked charcoal production (and any form of greenwood cutting), and frequently opposed the migrant woodcutters - Guineans - employed by Senegalese licensed urban private merchants. In fact, in 1994, leaders of traditional forest protection organizations within Wulli had been arrested for causing physical injury to migrant woodcutters (Faye 2006).

#### **4.2 ‘Depolitization’: or the perception of committees as instances for better representation**

The fact that council members are first nominated by party politics before they could apply for local elections has been a source of critiques to their partiality and a source of arguments for the instantiation of independent candidacy to local elections. This limitation has been taken up by the Forest Department and PROGEDE to idealize village-based committees, disqualifying the Rural Council from their organizational participatory scheme.

After the completion of PROGEDE's forest inventory, community forests in the jurisdictions of Wulli, Nieriko and Uul were delimited as Tambacounda Region experimental sites. Here, the project carried out the zoning, and took up the creation of committees to manage the forests. First, Village Committees were created and Village Committees that are located around a forest block formed a Block Management Committee. Each forest block had its Block Management Committee. Then, an Inter-Village Committee was composed of two representatives (the president and other member) from each Village Committee.<sup>v</sup>

The project hired facilitators and a 'Communication Manager' - *chargé de vulgarisation* - for the on-the-ground work. Both visited villages surrounding the delimited forests, and informed village chiefs of the site of a new project to combat bushfires and promote alternative revenue-generating activities. In the discourse of PROGEDE I staff, forest protection and revenue-generating activities were prioritized over woodcutting and charcoal burning for fear of a backlash from local people who opposed these activities. Since the facilitators themselves were from these villages and surrounding locations, they understood how people would react if the project's central (and actual) aims were to be vigorously disclosed.

After people were fooled through dissimulation of the project's true aims, some committees were created at the village level following a list of functions and roles already drawn out by PROGEDE staff. During the assembly, villagers were to come to a consensus about the establishment of the committee, but Village Chiefs (claiming to be the descendants of the first settlers) instead designated themselves, their relatives or low-caste persons to enter PROGEDE's structures indirectly (see Faye 2006). Their claims of historical legitimacy inhibited villagers; they could not contradict the Village Chiefs' choices. The Village Chiefs' intrusion in PROGEDE was also a strategic move to reinforce their legitimacy and to increase their power to choose the village committee leaders.

The project ruled that membership in the Village Committee was free and voluntary. However, a number of incentives were offered in order to encourage participation. For example, after the creation of village committees, project representatives on the ground announced that only members of the Village Committees and people who participated effectively in project-promoted activities were eligible to benefit from the alternative revenue-generation activities (for example, animal fattening, truck-farming, aviculture, and apiculture). Further, on the basis of a partnership between PROGEDE and the World Food Organization's Senegal office, those involved in market gardening could benefit from food support in hard times during the rainy season. These material incentives managed to boost the interest of villagers in the project activities and membership in the Village Committees.

Continuing its rejection of local elected authorities, PROGEDE recognized the Inter-Village Committee as a substitute for local government in decision-making processes related to forests and their benefits. According to PROGEDE, once the PCR had signed

the FMP and the Sub-Prefect approved it, the PCR would have legally delegated his management power to the villagers. However, none of the PCRs were aware of this implication, as it was neither their intention nor was it inscribed in the regulatory part of the management plan. Thus, PCRs continued to claim power over the forest management. The withholding of forest-management power from PCRs was publicly announced only in the Forest Department's circular (note) No. 000209 on January 29, 2009, which was said to complement the 2008 annual decree.<sup>vi</sup>

Based on their assumption that PROGEDE procedures ensured the transfer of powers to the villagers, the Inter-Village Committee began signing annual protocols with the Private Forest Merchants National Union (known in French as UNCEFS<sup>vii</sup>) for charcoal production within the managed Community Forests. These protocols allowed private merchants - selected at the discretion of forestry agents - to send their charcoal producers into the Community Forest, and allocated a quota to the merchants. Protocols also placed on merchants a number of obligations to be met to ensure their ability to operate within a Community Forest. However, drawing on technical claims, the Regional Forest Office retained the authority to amend the protocols, arguing that the both villagers' and private urban merchants' annual charcoal production quotas should be based on the Forest Office's assessment of production rates during the preceding campaign and on their estimates of the forest parcels' potential production.

Any of the Inter-Village Committee leaders, ever saw the draft protocols in 2011 and 2012 before being called to the meetings at which these were to be signed. Merchants and cooperatives, however, had received the draft before the meeting and had been given the power to negotiate its terms. The treasurer of a cooperative in Tambacounda, also president of the regional private merchants' union, asserted that each cooperative had initially got a quota of 550 quintals in 2010 and, 500 quintals in 2011. But after bargaining with the Regional Forest staff, each got 800 quintals in 2012. This is another illustration of the capacity of charcoal merchants to exert pressure on government authorities (see Ribot 1990; Boutinot and Diouf 2007; Ribot and Faye 2007, 2010) and of those same government authorities' willingness to yield to the will of private merchants (with whom they have bribe-seeking relations) while ignoring the needs and demands of the local people below them. While private charcoal producers were given ample opportunity to comment on and propose amendments to the protocols, village-based committee leaders were expected to simply accept the quotas allocated to them by the Forest Department (i.e. villagers remain in a position of "take it or leave it!"). The Inter-Village Committee also gained decision-making power over the distribution of permits (a certificate delivered by field forestry agents to sell charcoal in cities) to local people; the collection of charcoal taxes; and their redistribution among local beneficiaries, including the Rural Community. A local charcoal tax of \$0.40 US was levied on each sack of charcoal produced within the community forest, equivalent to \$160 US per truckload. The tax revenue was redistributed as follows: 40 percent (\$64 US) for the Rural Community; 40 percent for the village committee of the village to which the truck loaded was closest; and 20 percent (\$32 US) for the Inter-Village committee.

None of the committee leaders or the members of the local government could change the proportions proposed by the Forest Department and PROGEDE. Interestingly, the Forest Department ruled that the Inter-Village Committee's share could only be spent on 'environmental activities.' The management plan identified the locations and procedures governing expenditure of that share, leaving no voice to the Inter-Village committee leaders. In PROGEDE I, the fund served to support expenses during the annual delineation of parcels and firebreak clearance: costs for fuel, food and per diems for forestry agents, paint, and installment of forest-side village nurseries.

#### **4.3 Building networks of dependents: the role of reallocation of undue privileges**

PROGEDE, especially in its first phase, have been offering various material incentives to the people to boost village engagement in the project activities (Faye 2006; Boutinot et Diouf 2006). These incentives later ended up being elements to develop, maintain, and expand networks of dependencies. Opportunities to market charcoal added another layer to the dependency issue, as the subsection will show.

PROGEDE I provided to Inter-Village Committees labor materials such as carts, axes, wheelbarrows, and other various tools, which they would redistribute to Village Committees. Furthermore, Inter-Village Committee members benefited from non-material privileges: leaders participated in meetings and in training sessions. Therefore, they gained per diems and connections with high-level authorities such as the Directors of the Forest Department and PROGEDE's higher officials, and so on.

This increase in social capital boosted the material benefits committee members received from the charcoal industry: the presidents of the Inter-Village committees became real local charcoal merchants with easy access to production permits; as they had the privilege to cut through the forest to implement firebreaks. The cutting of firebreaks was an opportunity for these presidents to produce charcoal with the wood collected from the cutting operations. It was also a pretext for the local forestry agents to discriminate these presidents against the normal villagers, allowing the first to hire migrant woodcutters while preventing the latter from doing so. Two of these presidents were given the privilege to install "legal charcoal stocks" at secondary cities like Tambacounda city, selling charcoal sacks to urban consumers and travelers.

Inter-Village Committees received and distributed to Village Committees the permits needed to market charcoal to the cities, the most lucrative markets. Permits are held by the Forest Department, at the regional level. One receives a number of permits that corresponds to the size of the quota s/he is allocated by the Forest Department. Consequence of the project interventions is the existence of two main categories of actors that have right to access quota and permits: the private merchants and the 'village producers'. Once the field forest agents decide who receive how much and when, the permits due to villages were handled to the Inter-Village Committee who would, in turn, reallocated them to their affiliate Village Committees. This chain of distribution was usually based on personal (friendship and kinship) or business relationship (unclear deals) rather than equity and justice principles (Faye forthcoming).

This list of privileges is not exhaustive, but it shows that the Inter-Village Committee became a strong institution; their leaders gained important authority over commercial access to community forests, charcoal in particular. Because of the powers and resources and the favoritism they received in PROGEDE I, Inter-Village Committee leaders became subordinated to the project. To maintain their unmerited privileges, they remained upwardly accountable to the Forestry Department and PROGEDE staff, rather than downwardly accountable to the villagers whom they were meant to represent. When asked to describe their position in forest management, committee leaders responded in Wolof: *Prose moo nu fi tekk wante foore yi lanuy ligeyal*, saying, literally, “We come from project but we are working for forestry agents.” This ambiguous position is also reflected in Boutinot and Diouf (2006:1) who entitled their paper “When certain participatory approaches engender ambiguous forms of mobilization of civil society organizations in Senegal”<sup>viii</sup>.

The phrasing of Boutinot and Diouf’s title is very instructive, as it highlights another reason for committee leaders’ subordination and upward accountability to forestry agents. Whoever bestows authority determines also the form of accountability. And the way an institution perceives the source of its authority also determines to whom it is accountable. The leaders of Inter-Village committees systematically behaved accountably to PROGEDE staff and field forestry agents, whom they credited with creating and maintaining their present position. Likewise, most village committee leaders remained subordinate to Village Chiefs who had chosen them.

Committee leaders’ subordination to forestry agents and project promoters led them to plot with the latter - forestry agents in particular - to combat anyone whom they perceived to hold an opposing position. The first of their enemies were PCRs, because the PCRs had become aware of their exclusion from decisions regarding the management and use of Community Forests. Indeed, there was no institutional linkage between committees and the local governments. Thus, the Inter-Village committees entered into competition with local governments, challenging their authority over forests and keeping for themselves the material resources required for responsiveness. Therefore, PROGEDE I’s institutional choices (1) engendered the fragmentation of local authority and (2) led to the Forest Department’s delegitimization and disempowerment of elected local governments via the imposition and ascendance of technical claims and justifications (Ribot 2004a, 2004b; Manor 2004).

## **5. PROGEDE II: changing institutions, institutionalizing the rejection of representative democracy.**

Following the vibrant conflict between the PROGEDE-I staff and the national directorate of the Forest Department (see some elements of this dispute in Ribot 2014: 21-22), one would expect that some institutional changes would occur and that representative democracy would better-off. Indeed, the institutional changes have occurred but the representative democracy goal of decentralization reform has worse-off because of being institutionalized in the participatory organizational scheme of PROGEDE-II.

### 5.1 Institutional changes in management structure of PROGEDE-II

PROGEDE made some institutional changes in Phase II both in top management and in the ground management of the project. In the top management of PROGEDE-II (the second phase), the forest agents were excluded from the project operational staff following a conflict among forest agents in PROGEDE-I for positions and the related material resources.<sup>ix</sup> Only the National Coordinator was selected among the forestry agents to oversee the implementation of project activities and to serve as the institutional linkage between the independent experts the project would hire and the Forest Department. For the ground management of the project activities, the forest agents that led the project regional offices in PROGEDE-I have been replaced by so-called independent experts of various backgrounds: geographers, pastoralists, sociologists, and development specialists.

However, the project coordination directorate is still headquartered in the National Forest Service and is still led by a forestry agent selected by the government in collaboration with the World Bank country office in Senegal. Therefore, the coordinating forest agent who lead PROGEDE-II he is compelled by the hierarchical authority structure to obey the Forest Department's General Director and the government, that is the ministry in charge of the environment. This institutional complexity makes him dependent on the choices of these two upper-level authorities. This dependence on upper-level authorities is also true for the so-called independent experts since work is coordinated by the project Director, who is a forestry agent and accountable to the Forest Department Director and government. On the ground, they rely on the regional forest service directors, known as *Inspecteur Régional des Eaux et Forêts* (IREFs). PROGEDE, despite requiring independent local action on the part of project personnel is a project of the Forest Department, which continues to assert control over its activities on the ground.

On the ground, the impartiality of the regional officers of PROGEDE-II has also been challenged by the PRCs, who view them as promoting the withdrawal of PCRs' authority in matters of PCRs' forest governance. As one of the PCRs said:

The ladies [two of the three project officials were women, at Tambacounda] who lead PROGEDE-II in Tambacounda do not have a chance of succeeding. They are completely controlled by the Regional Forest Service. It was worse with the former Regional Forest Officer and his Departmental Officer (*Chef de Secteur*). But even with the new ones, the ladies behave as followers. You know, a project in the forest sector requires a leader who has the same weight as the Regional Forest Officers. Otherwise, they will only implement the methods and objectives of the forestry agents who everybody knows to not like the decentralization reform (*Ngeem*, PCR of *Nieriko*, December 27, 2012).

Complaining that, despite decentralization laws intended to put control in the hands of local elected governments, the project has increased the Forest Department's authority over forests, another PCR added:

The ladies are working for the forestry agents. I told one of them several days

ago that once their job is finished, they will replace us with forestry agents, so that they can lead our Rural Communities (PCR of *Gumbee*, December 27, 2012). For some field forestry agents, the recruitment of experts rather than forestry agents who hold the knowledge is irrelevant. On November 30, 2012, the opening of a long-scheduled national workshop in Tambacounda was delayed for two hours because PROGEDE's so-called experts had not arrived. A field forestry agent, chatting with one of his colleagues who had been complaining about the delay, said: "*Ken munta tari lumu jangul. Danoo xamul nag!*" This Wolof saying means: "No one can relate what he has never heard about! They are ignorant about forest concerns." Forestry agents clearly denied the capacity of the so-called experts (whom PROGEDE-II has hired in place of the forestry agents who did the work under PROGEDE-I) to manage a forest management project. In their view, because the 'experts' are not forestry agents, they lack the technical expertise required for this job. Indeed, two of project officials in Tambacounda were geographers, and the other was a pastoralist. This is another illustration of the fact that forestry agents claim strictly exclusive knowledge on forest issues and were unhappy to see people from other areas of expertise leading PROGEDE-II.

## **5.2 Institutionalizing the rejection of representative democracy, creating conditions for subordination.**

The rationale for introducing associations in replacement to the former Inter-Village Committees in the participatory organizational scheme of PROGEDE-II did not have to do with a search for better representation but a discourse on efficiency and the belief that these forms of organizations would resist possible attempts of Rural Councils to eliminate or re-structure them at the end of PROGEDE-II as it had been the case at the end of PROGEDE-I.

PROGEDE-II began in 2012 with an organizational assessment of PROGEDE-I area interventions. In mid-May, a workshop took place at Tambacounda to share the results of the consultancy that would influence the upcoming changes in the participatory organizational scheme during PROGEDE-II. Participants were PRCs, members of both the national and local Forest Services, as well as regional and local administrative authorities. Other environmental project representatives were also invited to share their experiences.

The consultant's report on the assessment concluded that: PROGEDE I's organizational scheme was not unreliable; PCRs had created new institutional forms to supplant the project's Inter-Village committees; and village committees had ceased to function. The consultant did not address the achievements of PCR-driven committees during the intermediary period. The report stated only that, due to the empowerment of Inter-Village Committee leaders, PCRs had lost influence and annulled the Inter-Village Committees to recover authority over the forests (Ndiaye 2012).

The Consultant proposed three organizational models:

- an Association for management of the forest;

- an Executive Board whose members should manage decisions and operating activities, such as local tax collection and the enforcement of technical prescriptions;
- a distinction made between functions of management and functions of control. The elected local authorities' function should be limited to controlling and auditing the Executive Board.

In the end, the proposal brought back many of the features of PROGEDE-I, except that, as I will show below, privatization has now been adopted. The newly created organization is called the Association of the Inter-Village Forest Management Committee. It was established in *Wulli* and *Gumbee* according to the following procedure:

- In each village, a “contact group” of two men and two women is nominated;
- In each of the five forest blocks, village “contact group” members will choose five delegates;
- All “contact groups” will form the General Assembly of the community forest of *Wulli/Gumbee*;
- The 25 delegates of forest block (5 for each forest block; they are designated or elected from the village contact group members) elect members of the Executive Board of the Association. The Executive Board is the operational body and will make decisions about forest use and management. The board is composed of six members: a president and a vice-president, a general secretary and an assistant general secretary, and a general treasurer and an assistant general treasurer.

By nature, an Association is a private non-lucrative corporation recognized by state administrative bodies. As constituted under PROGEDE-II, the Association legally excludes members of the Rural Council. More concretely, the power to manage the community forests is a public power, which, with the creation and empowerment of the Association, has been now moved to the private realm. One of the justifications for the creation of the Association is that it would ostensibly enable a more efficient implementation of the FMPs, that is, of the technical prescriptions that would (the Forest Department claimed) guarantee sustainable forest management.

Project promoters then asked the local governments to appoint two government auditors. Project staff and forestry agents thought that PRCs would be happy to audit the Association. However, the PCRs said they preferred the organizational structure of USAID-Wula Nafaa (another management project in Senegal), which recognizes the authority of Rural Councils over forests, and has for that reason made the president of the Rural Council's environmental commission head of the managing committees in its intervention areas. The Directorate of the Forest Management and Production Division at the Forest Department responded by saying:

Donors are just accompanying us, but at the end, the Forest Department is responsible for choosing which of the projects is better, or for finding a (organizational) model that mixes the strengths of each. To arrive at that decision, we need to test many models. Let's try this one and see (*Ndeymbili*, Niji

Hotel, May 2012).

Opposition to PROGEDE's proposal was obvious. Many conflicts had arisen in the process of creating the Association. On the one hand, the project and forestry agents exhibited intimidating behavior; on the other hand, PCRs resisted by boycotting meetings, sabotaging project activities, citing decentralization laws, and strategically deceiving project promoters and forestry agents. In the *Wulli* and *Gumbee* cases, PCRs proposed an Association for each rural jurisdiction. The project and forestry agents refused, arguing that the community forest under management straddled the border between the two communities and must therefore have only one (inter-community) Association.

The two PCRs were frustrated, and one, declaring that his opinion didn't "count," boycotted any form of participation in project affairs. The second, instead, sabotaged the Association's opening general assembly. He convinced the delegates of two of the three forest blocks within his rural jurisdiction to boycott the general assembly. This event was successfully postponed, despite the presence of local administrative authorities (the project's National Coordinator and the National Forest Service Vice-Director). The general assembly then took place after the regional project experts had come to an agreement with the concerned PCR, on November 30, 2012.

Concrete attempts were made to intimidate local people and their representatives during the November event. In addition to all the official attendees cited above, the then National Director of the National Forest Service came in person, instead of sending his deputy. He began his opening speech by castigating the PCRs for their oppositional behavior: "We will no longer accept, from anyone, no matter his position, the dissolution of a committee or the exercise of any form of sabotage on the activities of the project." Despite the opposition of PCRs and their call for the project to comply with decentralization reform, at least during its second phase, PROGEDE-II gaining support from the Forest Department could impose a new participatory organizational scheme. Indeed, after an association was formed at each Rural Community-level, an economic and interest group known as GIE (*groupement d'intérêts économiques*) would be created at the village-level and GIEs would later be regrouped in Forest-Block Committees – the same that forest management experts and forest agents had delineated during the identification the managed forest which borders had been mostly rejected by villagers.

Crafting associations and Forest-Block Committees that would play respectively the same role than the former Inter-Village Committees and Village Committees in PROGEDE, would only maintain subordination and upward accountability rather than the promise of representative democracy. Further, the inscription of the decision to deny rural councilors membership to associations in the participatory organizational scheme was a form of institutionalizing the rejection of representative democracy and creating conditions for subordination. The creation of forms of organizations that Rural Councils would not be able to dissolve or eliminate, even if they did not behave correctly, could be interpreted as an intention for securing favorable conditions for continuing upward accountability and subordination.

## 6. Discussions and Conclusion

Decentralization laws, their implementation and their use in project interventions shape the power relations among the actors involved in natural resources management. Indeed, state actors impose institutional choices that aim to strengthen technical claims, using very sophisticated instruments such as FMPs and the related so-called participatory organizational scheme. In addition, negotiating the terms of project interventions at the level of central government (e.g. the Forestry Service) fosters the allocation of decision-making powers to higher-level actors, consequently granting them the ability to craft institutions and create authorities that run parallel to (and compete with) local elected governments. Therefore, environmental projects that prioritize ‘technical prescriptions’ end up giving the Forest Department the resources and rationale it needs to disempower the elected local governments while subordinating the participatory institutions they create.

The so-called participatory institutions, be they referred to as committees or associations, do not foster neither participation nor representation. The case analyzed here has shown that, even the participatory institutions have been created in the name of more participation and better representation of the local people in the project activities, those institutions have ended up behaving as lower-level entities of the project and the Forest Department. In cultural contexts like in Senegal, who makes an institution exerts authority on it and whichever institution feels to originate from anyone power behave subordinate to it. Indeed, committee and association leaders think they originate from the project and therefore, think they should be working for the Forest Department. Such relations of dependency have been further developed, maintained and expanded through the allocation and re-allocation of the undue privileges using the material and non-material incentives of the project or the mechanism for access to natural resources such as permits and quota.

Refusing voice and financial resources to the elected local governments means depriving them from the means they need to be responsive to local demands and to fulfill the legal and political obligations that decentralization reforms assigned them to. Like accountability, responsiveness is a key component of local democracy (Ribot 2003, 2004a). It is the first step toward representative democracy. One can only be democratically accountable when one holds public powers and resources – when one has something for which to be held to account. Therefore, any form of accountability is derived from the holding of public powers and resources.

Forestry agents’ ‘recentralization impulse,’ is rooted in their desire to maintain their ability to receive and extort bribes (Ribot and Faye 2010; on corruption in this sector also see Blundo 2011; Faye 2006; Kanté 2006) and affirm their exclusive professional legitimacy with regard to forest issues. Because of these factors, certain field forestry agents have no interest in seeing the Rural Councils be representative. If local governments are responsive and accountable, there is a high probability that local people will support them; this would compromise the Forest Department’s ability to successfully impose technically framed forest governance through PROGEDE-created structures.

That is one of the reasons why Forest Service agents act like neo-dictators, following a 'divide and rule' strategy that pits local governments against the organizations created by the project within the jurisdiction that locally elected governments are legally in charge of. This 'divide and rule' strategy is the new institutional pluralism; it is a means of fragmenting the local polity for easy management through 'indirect rule' as committee leaders become subordinated to the forestry service.

Instead of promoting participatory democracy - a "broad participation of the public in environmental and other forms of public decision-making" (Overdevest 2000: 686) - upwardly accountable authorities have been fabricated under the guise of participatory project management and forest cover maintenance (sustainability). The village-based committees created by the Forest Service and its projects are merely symbolic; they are tools that enable the ejection of the local government from forest governance while crafting favorable conditions for institutionalized subordination and upward accountability.

Substantially, there is no difference between upward accountability and subordination as understood by Ribot (2009, 2014). Both constitute the over-rule of local authorities by central actors through administrative or technical bodies. Both have a deleterious effect on local politics, which could instead be fostered through democratic decentralization. In addition, both are made possible by external funding simply because the Forest Department says it cannot be effectively present in the field due to insufficient and underequipped forestry employees who are overloaded with administrative tasks. So, external funding provides an opportunity for government bodies to restrain decentralization by imposing technical claims. This is not to say that participatory or decentralization projects do not bring about positive social change (see Dieng *et al.* 2008 for details on socio-economic impacts). For instance, without the intervention of PROGEDE in Tambacounda, local people might not be deriving revenues from commercial forest activities.

However, government officials and project staff engage in a showcase or an 'on-stage' performance of success (while hiding patent failures) that fascinates donors, while through 'off-stage' practices they subordinate local people and dominate local governments. The first, the performance of success, is exhibited and idealized in official reports, workshops, documentaries, and press releases. The second, the subordination of local people, is smoothly hidden by local Forest Department agents on the ground and justified by the Forest Department through technical claims. Hence, the sporadic visits of donors to project areas cannot provide insights into off-stage activities: they are happy to perceive what they are shown. This being said, I am not arguing against the funding of environmental projects by donors. I am just fleshing out the political uses and effects of these projects on decentralized democracy, emphasizing the importance of promoting, rather than hindering, the responsiveness of elected local authorities for the long-term sustainability of forest governance and local development.

Because of the right for representation they imply, democratic decentralization reforms,

when they really implemented nor masqueraded, are critical for the “safeguard of essential ecological functions, the protection of essential livelihood activities, and the economic value of forests at all scales of society” (Ribot and *al.* 2010: 35). After decentralization reform, there is no way to guarantee institutional sustainability and consistency without the explicit articulation of local governments with participatory organizations - which also means articulating participation with decentralization (Ribot 2001b). Other reasons for intentionally (and as a matter of policy) engaging local elected authorities in the implementation and benefit-structure of natural resource interventions are the ephemerality of projects and the lack of means or state motivation to uphold pro-rural public services.

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## Indexes:

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<sup>i</sup> The second phase spanned almost all the East, South, Southeast, and Centre of Senegal as activities on food security and alternative energy were expanded.

<sup>ii</sup> A Rural Community/Council is not a state-appointed body; it is led by a Council (known as the Rural Council) composed of at least 27 democratically elected members whose job it is to politically represent the villagers. A President (known as PCR) and two vice-presidents (the PCRs) lead the Rural Council, constituting its executive body.

<sup>iii</sup> Following the promulgation of the law No.2013-10 (December 28, 2013) and the latest local elections held in Senegal on 29 June 2014, Rural Communities have become (rural) Communes.

<sup>iv</sup> The second phase also had a one-year delay.

<sup>v</sup> The massif of Wulli/Gumbee has five forest blocks, with two in the territory of the Rural Community of Wulli and three in the former Rural Community of Gumbee.

<sup>vi</sup> The regulatory note that is publicized each year by the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources through the Forest Department to set the rules for commercial forest activities, including charcoal production and trade.

<sup>vii</sup> UNCEFS stands for Union nationale des coopératives d'exploitants forestiers du Sénégal.

<sup>viii</sup> "Quand certaines approches participatives engendrent des formes ambiguës de mobilisation de la société civile".

<sup>ix</sup> I will not elaborate on this point in this paper. Another paper will be dedicated on it later.