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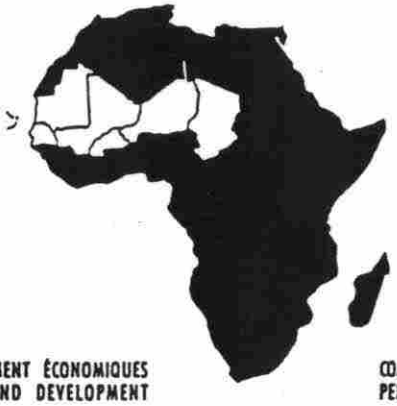

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THE DYNAMICS OF ORGANIZATION IN THE RURAL SAHEL

Farmers' groups and rural organizations: limits and potential

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Key words: Peasant Organizations/Rural Environment/ Rural Development/Agricultural Population/ Agricultural Development/Burkina Faso/Mali/ Senegal

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Preface

This document is the synthesis of results from three missions by Club du Sahel members and consultants, sent to Burkina Faso, Senegal and Mali to identify and describe rural organizations conducting original experiments in development in their local environment. Although additional information on other countries from interviews or written sources is available, the present document cannot attempt to describe the situation in the CILSS countries as a whole, or even the overall situation in the countries visited, owing to the diversity of this movement. The content of this report is the sole responsibility of its author, and makes no claim to reflect the official views of the Club du Sahel.

Besides being limited in its geographical scope, owing to lack of information the report takes almost no account of the herders' groups which, throughout the Sahel, are also taking their future in hand collectively.

The author wishes to thank Catherine Guibourg, Philippe Lavigne Delville, Jacques Mercoiret, Jacques Moineau, Jean-Pierre Prod'homme and Philippe Sahuc, thanks to whose critical comments he was able to improve the content of his text.

THE DYNAMICS OF ORGANIZATION IN THE RURAL SAHEL

farmers' groups and rural organizations: limits and potential

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FOREWORD

As everyone is surely aware by now, the rural Sahel is living through a crisis. It is best known and most visible as a climatic and ecological crisis, but it is also an economic crisis and an identity crisis. The tradition has been disrupted by changes that have occurred too rapidly, and no longer applies to all aspects of life on the land. It is fast losing its coherence as a system. The traditional family and village structures now have to confront the strategies of individuals or sub-groups whose interests may be in contradiction with those of the larger group. Combined with such disruption in social management at the local level, ecological and economic problems are drawing the Sahel's country areas into a dangerous spiral of degradation and decline.

Perhaps this trend is not inescapable. There are many who think it can be avoided and are seeking new solutions, a new socio-ecological balance that will make it possible to continue to live and produce on the land while treating the environment better. For if there is a solution, it must necessarily involve a thoroughgoing reform of current structures and practices and a search for a new coherence.

The purpose of the present document is to examine what has been done by local Sahelian population groups themselves to seek out and set in motion new forms of local organization that respect their cultural heritage but are more appropriate to present-day constraints and conditions. Many initiatives of this kind exist, many of them have brought innovation and can boast real successes. The report will examine the nature and impact of such local initiatives and their counterparts at the regional or even national levels.

But it must be borne in mind that while grass-roots action is of crucial importance, it is not sufficient in itself. While it is barely possible to predict, let alone change, future climatic trends in the Sahel, certain of those involved in development could have a considerable impact on macro-economic conditions in the region and their local effects in terms of farmers' purchasing power, the profitability of certain crops, the existence of market outlets, etc. Similarly, legislators have the power to entrust the nation's wealth - or at least the

management of it - to those who will make best use of it. For these groups, as for the rural population, radical changes in current practice are sometimes called for. For however useful they may be, the farmers' group formula cannot spread unless it is given a framework within which it can survive. Farmers will probably not be able to rectify the present situation entirely on their own - or if they do, the price will be terribly high. The process must involve everyone in their own sphere of competence.

A) INTRODUCTION

1) A brief description of the movement

1.1) Colonial policy and post-independence government policy on rural development: mixed results

The need to organize the rural world soon became clear to those responsible for managing the Sahel territories, and in 1910 the French government launched the "Sociétés Indigènes de Prévoyance" in the groundnut-growing Senegal Basin. These organizations were linked to groundnut production and their main aim was to ensure proper management of seed resources.

On the other hand, independent organizations sprang up in the same cash crop areas in response to government shortcomings: during the Second World War, when there were few officials to manage the farmers, an informal, pre-cooperative movement emerged from a variety of different, original organizational experiments.

This movement, which arose in opposition to the groundnut traders' interests especially, was not dissolved but was formalized and then taken over by bigger interests and lost its drive.

Even before independence, then, some of the issues and problems connected with rural organization had already arisen.

After independence, the different Sahel countries passed through several phases, in fairly similar ways (in fact developments took a different turn in the non-French-speaking countries, but this point will not be examined here).

- A participation phase, in which the government promoted rural organization and direct contact with farmers, regarded at this stage as citizens who must work towards development through cooperative structures enjoying government support. In Mali this phase took the form of forced collectivization through the village groups, and proved a failure.

- A phase of large-scale projects, with official or parastatal regional organizations set up to manage them. The participative aspect of development was now abandoned in favor of its

technical aspects: equipping the farmers and bettering performance became the guidelines, combined with a top-to-bottom model of extension work and outside management that often had scant regard for the realities of local life or the identity of the farmer.

While in some cases these operations did have broadly positive results, with a real impact on productivity and farm incomes leading to a more general upsurge of local and regional economic development, they often failed - not only (predictably) in organizational terms, but also in technical terms.

The mistakes made in these two phases resulted in a premature disillusionment with the cooperative concept: cooperatives were seen as rigid organizations resulting from a sometimes invasive government control. As a result, the organizations that are now taking the rural world in hand through independent action prefer to be called "groups" rather than "cooperatives", even though they are in many ways reminiscent of the early cooperatives in Europe.

- From 1980 onwards, the Sahel governments could see the relative failure of the large-scale projects, State cooperatives and development companies - a failure that became increasingly obvious as money became scarce, since these structures remained very expensive and very inefficient. Under pressure from donors and structural adjustment plans, governments now gave farmers greater freedom and relative independence of action. However, despite the growing numbers of local farmers' organizations and the increasing support of the NGOs, the new relationship does not yet seem to be one of trust: what is occurring is a forced withdrawal by the Sahel governments, not a voluntary move to replace top-down development structures with a new type of organization and a new farmer/government relationship.

  Be this as it may, the self-organization movement, the "groups", should be able to take advantage of the gap left by the governments' gradual disengagement. For the movement this could be the culmination of a long march that began slowly in the 1960s and has been increasing its pace ever since.

1.2) Emergence of an alternative: the origin and development of the farmers' groups and the notion of self-help in the rural Sahel

a. The beginning of the movement

During the 1960s, a few non-government teams, often led by religious people, launched training schemes in the Sahel. At first these were designed for officials with responsibility for agriculture, development companies' extension workers, and all those with some responsibility in rural development provided they already had a good education. The schemes remained very academic, their content centered on socio-economic issues.

But around 1965 it became clear that it was also necessary to train some of the more go-ahead farmers - illiterate farmers included. Teaching adopted a new approach: lectures were abandoned, participants were encouraged to express themselves. Courses began to include practical training alongside the theoretical education. This new method brought out the interaction between training and development, and made it possible to adjust training to the needs of group activity in rural areas. From the 1970s on, the training centers were to devote most of their efforts to this method of work, rapidly acquiring a large audience among farmers. The aim of the training gradually changed along with its audience and methods: whereas in the beginning their aim was essentially to popularize technical information, the centers have gradually turned towards subjects of more obvious concern to the villagers: health, childcare, credit, etc.

The handful of "alternative" training centers that have run these experiments (CESAO, INADES, GRAAP, IPD) most certainly played an important part in the creation of farmers' groups throughout West Africa. Their methods only took definitive form after many hesitations and occasional analytic errors. In particular, it has been hard to find a way of disseminating the achievements of the centers' trainees. Should one train "pilot" farmers in the hope that their example will be followed, or should one more specifically train group leaders? It is the latter option that seems in fact to have met with most success and, in any case, it has to be acknowledged that many of the most outstandingly energetic groups in the Sahel are led by former trainees of these centers.

b. Evolution and numerical growth of the farmers' groups

It was from 1973 onwards that the farmers' group phenomenon mushroomed. The drought that hit the Sahel in these years probably played a major part in this development. This was partly because it showed the farmers the limitations of their existing systems of organization and partly because the emergency, bringing an influx of foreign aid, also brought a flood of NGOs to manage the aid, and these NGOs spread the idea of the village group. This type of organization has enjoyed considerable success, perhaps at first because it facilitated access to aid, but subsequently because it proved useful to the village communities in various ways.

At the same time the groups extended their field of action, moving on from an almost exclusive involvement in training activities to more economic spheres, first setting up grain banks, then seeking to diversify economic activities so as to provide greater security of income and food supplies for their villagers.

2) The current situation

2.1) The local groups

Numbers vary from country to country. The figure of 9,000 is quoted for Burkina Faso, 4,500 of them officially recognized; 800 to 1,000 officially recognized groups in Senegal; a lower figure for Mali and an even lower one for Niger, where the farmers are organized primarily through State cooperatives. For the whole of the Sahel the figures usually given are 10-15,000. The groups also differ in their relationship to the State, which may range from theoretical autonomy (as in Senegal, where they are obliged to coordinate with the local administration) to very strong institutional control (Niger). The usual size of these groups is around 50 to 80 members, though of course there can be wide variations. The importance of the part played by women in the groups is also very variable, though they are generally under-represented, except in cases where a men's group and a women's group exist side by side.

2.2) Support organizations (local, national and foreign)

a. Federations of groups

These have developed very unevenly in the different countries. In some cases the groups remain isolated and have no federal structure, owing either to immaturity or to political obstacles. In other cases federations abound at all levels, sometimes with two competing organizations as in Senegal.

b. Development support organizations

These are still very often NGOs from the "developed" countries which first helped set up the farmers' groups and have assisted their development. However, the official aid agencies are increasingly becoming involved in local development support programs, and similarly African NGOs are beginning to emerge, often led by local intellectuals.

c. Federations of development support organizations

These federations differ from those mentioned above in that they make no claim to emanate from grass-roots level but rather to coordinate the activities of NGOs working in support of local grass-roots initiatives. They are to be found everywhere: CONGAD in Senegal, CCA ONG in Mali, SPONG in Burkina Faso, etc. However, there often exist other, more selective federations of organizations that have been working together for many years or which have interests in common: BEL in Burkina Faso and USE in Senegal for example.

d. Technical and group leadership training centers

There are few of these centers and, whereas the federations of groups and the federations of support organizations operate essentially in national terms, the centers are region-wide in scope. Their work is essentially qualitative, i.e., they reach a fairly limited public but provide that public with a good level of technical and group leadership training.

B) FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE FARMERS' GROUPS

In order to acquire a broader knowledge of the farmers' groups and a better understanding of the way they operate and the results they can achieve, it seems important to examine the remarkably wide range of activities they undertake. In fact even a hasty examination shows that virtually all the groups are concerned with technical, organizational and economic factors alike. One could almost define these groups as a new form of social organization enabling technical innovations to be introduced under optimum conditions, improvements to be made to the socio-economic conditions of the village especially and its surrounding area, and the achievement of genuine development to take place. However, the farmers in these groups could also take on a new political role in the Sahel countries, at a modest grass-roots level at first and then progressively more assertively as the groups organize and form federations: that is the ultimate role of these groups, though it is also the least certain.

These different roles and the links between them will be described more fully below - though the movement is so varied and the numbers of little-known or unknown groups so great that the coverage cannot be exhaustive. An attempt will be made nonetheless to give an overview of these groups, with emphasis on what is at stake in their activities and the problems they may encounter, rather than on form and method.

1) The farmers' group: channel for technical and economic change

1.1) Services and support for individual production

Many farmers' groups today are geared towards supplying services that are collectively organized and managed, but are then used as the producer (individual or, more usually, family

group) thinks fit. These services involve input supplies and, less commonly, marketing. There are a number of reasons for this orientation:

- in the first place, it does not interfere with the management and decision-making power of the production unit, which remains free to retain its traditional form of organization or change it, as it sees fit;

- secondly, it frees the producer of the burden of finding inputs, since collective purchasing is, generally speaking, less time-consuming for the individual, and constitutes a firmer basis for negotiations over prices and delivery dates;

- lastly, it is a way of reducing the amount of money leaving the village. One of the priorities in rural development is to raise the incomes of both the producers and the village as an entity; but it is hard to see how, under present circumstances, the producers can act to increase their earnings, as they have no influence over market prices. For the time being, therefore, the amount of money available can only be increased by a reduction in costs. Since it would be inappropriate to reduce costs by reducing the amounts of inputs, which in fact should be increased to prevent an impoverishment of the soil, there is clearly an urgent need for the farmers' groups to reduce input costs by either negotiating wholesale prices, taking over the traders' role and appropriating their trading markup, or finding alternative solutions. Alternative solutions include the seed banks that are now springing up (e.g. among groundnut farmers) and the rediscovery of natural fertilizers such as compost and animal manure. Most such solutions can only be applied with the help of collective organization.

The services involved are primarily agricultural (farm equipment, input supplies, laying out market gardens, etc.), but they may also concern rural life more generally (e.g. training a blacksmith and providing him with modern equipment).

Collective marketing is a more sensitive operation, but the farmers' groups should handle this too. It involves storage problems for the group and/or the individual (in the latter case the group only intervenes in the actual sale transaction). But this raises the problem of each member's individual financial needs, which will affect his or her decision to sell or not to sell. The establishment of an operational farm season credit system is probably a necessary precondition if the group is to gain real control over the marketing of its produce.

1.2) Collective production activities

Many groups undertake productive activities together, in some cases separate activities for men and women. Some donors more or less consciously promote this type of organization, because it matches their image of a "traditional" African society in which sharing is the key social value.

In fact, the problem is not as simple as that. There do exist highly developed forms of collective labor in certain traditional African societies. But its purpose is not to generate income for redistribution: as a rule it is carried out in the common interest (upkeep of the village), out of solidarity (working the fields of a sick villager or a religious dignitary, etc.), or for festive purposes (the money earned is used to organize festivities at the end of the rainy season). It can be seen, therefore, that collective work for production is a new development in African societies and, while it is not to be ruled out given its obvious advantages, it does require caution in its implementation.

This is all the more true in that, contrary to what some still believe, rural Sahelian societies are not exclusively "traditional" but now embrace many modern threads and elements, including a growing individualism and entry into the money economy - two important factors that are often interconnected. This is generally true, despite the fact that modernity is advancing at different rates and with different consequences in different areas.

While it is possible and, in some cases, desirable to introduce some form or another of collective labor in the farmers' groups, it is the local population that must ultimately decide whether it is appropriate or not. It must not be introduced for ideological reasons or on the basis of preconceived ideas, or in defiance of the society's current practices. If the product of the collective labor is to be shared among the group members, the formula mentioned above, of collective support for individual production, seems to be the best solution. If the product is not for redistribution but is to provide funds for the group itself, group members must be very clear about how it is to be used, since experience shows that putting resources into a collective fund is not a motivating factor. The collective fund must not be merely a point of transition, and the work must be carried out as part of a clearly defined and commonly agreed project.

In any case, to avoid internal dissent to arise within the group, it is crucially important that the fruit of this collective labor be managed in a way that is open and clear for group members to see.

In a small, very mixed village in Casamance whose 300 inhabitants belong to four different ethnic groups and two different religions, a collective garden was created, the income from which was to be used "for the good of the village". When the first funds were used to equip the mosque, the Christian minority left the group. After some setbacks in the sale of the garden produce, earnings slowly accumulated but there was no clearly defined objective for the use of the money. At the present time, the group's members come from only one of the village's ethnic groups, and without any stated common objective the logic that binds the village group is no longer a village logic, nor an economic logic, but purely the pleasure people derive from working together with others who share a common culture - in other words, more or less the traditional logic of collective labor.

1.3) Land development, land management, infrastructures

A group can often do more and better than the sum of its individual members taken individually. This is a commonplace observation, but it is especially true with respect to village lands, whether the task is land development and improvement or merely land use management. In fact, many groups have improved one part of their village lands, usually pond-shore, but far fewer groups have undertaken development of their lands as a whole.

This land development work, nearly always a collective task owing to the scale of the task, is a good indicator of the group's energy and momentum. The work is done during the dry season; it does not compete with individual production, but it can run counter to individual income diversification strategies (seasonal emigration to the towns). Were the land development to succeed in keeping on the land those who usually leave for the dry season, the young in particular, this would be an indisputable sign of success. Many groups apply pressure by imposing fines on absentees.

Collective land development is first and foremost an investment in time, and is only possible because the value of

labor is lower in the dry season than in the wet season, since the possible economic alternatives are very limited.

While economic reasoning does not explain all aspects of group behavior, it is certainly part of the reason why land management is less popular than once-off development schemes: its impact on output (and hence on income) is less visible and, in the short term, is less marked. Furthermore, it does not only involve work during the dry season but often also means lasting changes in farming and herding practices which can mean more work during the rainy season (folding the herd, etc.) - at a time when the workload is very heavy and the opportunity cost of labor is high. This is why groups only undertake land management when they are fully aware of its implications and importance.

Yet it is vitally important for the future that farmers take land management in hand as this is, to a large extent, a precondition for taking control of local development. And while it is partly the responsibility of governments to manage land use through their practices and the laws they introduce, effective land management requires a high capacity for reflection and organization on the part of local communities and groups, involving major cultural changes. Local groups - group leaders particularly - will certainly have a pioneering role to play in this field, and they should be prepared for this role as of now.

One last problem is to decide what is to become of the land developed: often it already belongs to individuals, either formally or by custom. This is especially true of the pond-shore. But the group's work adds considerably to the value of the land, and the question of how to distribute the surplus value generated by collective labor must be raised in clear terms. Various solutions have been adopted: the plot can be "collectivized" and possibly redistributed among the group members; or it can remain the property of its former owner, each group member awaiting his or her turn. This solution, necessarily unequal in the first, transitional period, can only work in a strongly welded community capable of long-term planning. There are instances where this system operates.

1.4) Other socially and economically-related service activities: grain banks, mills, health facilities

The farmers' groups have developed many services regarded as "social" because they are not directly productive. These include grain banks, millet mills, primary health care, literacy classes, technical training, etc. These services generally arouse a true

interest among group members, and are sometimes the reason for joining the group. The different services involve very different limitations and advantages, however, and it is worth looking at each more specifically.

a. The grain banks

Farmers' groups and their members have become aware of the need for better managed, more secure grain supplies, especially after recent difficult "hungry season". There are two problems to be resolved: the first is to ensure that there is grain available in the village or within reach of it during this period of scarcity before the next harvest; and the second is to be able to sell at a reasonable price, since speculation runs high during this "hungry gap" and prices can double or treble compared to prices just after harvest.

Grain banks provide solutions to both problems, and the practice has become widespread. The concept spread in two waves, the first during the drought of 1973 and the second during the 1984/85 drought - two periods when the flow of food aid into rural areas was considerable. The grain banks work in two ways. In areas of systematic shortage they operate as supply cooperatives, buying grain in areas of surplus when prices are lowest, and selling it during the "hungry gap" at a generally modest mark-up, usually at a lower price than the traders'. By contrast, in areas that are self-sufficient on average but where year-to-year fluctuations can be considerable, the grain banks constitute buffer stocks that compensate for these fluctuations. The banks are thus guided by two principles - equalizing between regions and equalizing between years, each grain bank seeking its own equilibrium between the two practices.

The grain banks also play an important part in establishing carry-over stocks, partly taking over from the householders who traditionally fulfilled this function. The householders are under considerable pressure from their families and the outside world to buy consumer goods, and are finding it increasingly difficult to resist consumerist temptations while managing their grain stores in the best way possible. Participation in a grain bank often means that the householder must adhere to group discipline and to a schedule of consumption (some reserves are held back until after the season's agricultural work begins). This facilitates better management of the household's own reserves.

Generally speaking, the initial grain stock is financed from outside, either directly or with a collective village decision to repay all or part of a food aid donation. There are also systems designed to increase stocks and to cover losses due to damage during storage or failure to repay. These involve interest (or an equivalent formula among groups anxious to obey the Islamic ban on usury), or collective fields producing specifically for the grain bank, or, in many cases, a combination of the two.

The grain banks do not necessarily represent a wealth-creating activity, but they do provide rural Sahelians with more certain, less expensive supplies, and Sahelians have perceived the need for them during difficult hungry season. One sign of farmer motivation is the high rate of repayment generally observed. However, a grain bank may have the undesired effect of encouraging some householders to run down their own stocks, being certain that the bank will have a reserve should the need arise. A second negative effect is that, by limiting speculation and soaring grain prices during the hungry season, the bank increases, de facto, the opportunity cost of storage. Seen from this angle the grain bank to some extent helps draw the village into the money economy.

It seems that when there is a series of good harvests there is a downturn in mobilization around the grain banks, which find themselves in a more difficult situation: farmers have their grain store full and do not need to call on the banks, but the banks still have to turn over their stocks and renew them, as they cannot store grain for much longer than a year. Moreover, while they are not trying to make a systematic profit, the grain banks do at least hope to strike a financial balance; yet in periods of surplus, hungry gap prices remain low and the available margin is very narrow, especially as some banks refuse, out of solidarity, to buy from farmers at too low a price.

One project in Niger is trying out another grain bank formula, operating with little working capital but turning it over several times a year (up to five times for the most energetic banks). This way the bank becomes a real collective supply facility, operating in the same way as the traders but with narrower margins that enables it to trade between areas where the price gradient is relatively gentle and where there is no spontaneous trade.

In Burkina Faso, the first grain banks were set up by NGOs in 1973; the method then spread and was even taken up by government agencies. At the present time, 20% of the country's

villages run grain banks, though they are very unevenly distributed, depending not so much on actual need as on which areas the NGOs have been operating in.

According to C. Guibourg, the advantages farmers mention are:

- food security during the hungry season,
- savings in time and travel,
- hungry season loans for villagers,
- a strengthening of village solidarity,
- establishment of a collective storage structure.

The problems they mention are:

- the difficulty of making a profit in years of surplus,
- the low level of village savings and the low rates of repayment,
- the lack of supplies in deficit areas,
- the conflict between profitability and application of official prices,
- the lack of training and follow-up.

C. Guibourg's study also shows that the grain banks behave like conventional economic operators, working a good deal with local traders but maintaining few links between themselves.

While the grain banks are undeniably useful in times of crisis, then, the problem arises of what is to become of them between two crises. It may be of interest to establish whether, at times when they do not need the grain bank's services, farmers are ready to make a small sacrifice to ensure its survival as a means of insurance and improved food security. After harvest, for example, they could exchange a sack of new millet for a sack of last year's grain, to keep the working capital in good order.

But the question of the grain banks' future also has to be posed in much more general terms. They were created at a time of crisis for a single, specific purpose, but <u>they must now broaden the scope of their activities and take on other functions</u>, in connection with staple food supplies, marketing wherever there is a marketable surplus, or other activities. In Senegal, for example, groups in different areas have exchanged millet for rice in order to diversify their supplies; although there are few successful examples of this practice as yet, they will certainly spread.

Furthermore, this also raises the more general question of whether the rural organizations can resist being channeled too narrowly by a model introduced from outside, as well as adapting it to their own changing needs.

b. The grain mills

The grain mills have a very special place among the "social services" provided by the groups. In the first place, they are intended for a specific population group, the women; and secondly, they do not create a new function, but very much reduce the arduousness of a traditional task. To our knowledge, the demand for a mill is virtually unanimous among women and (a sign of the times, perhaps) is generally understood by a majority of men. Management of the mills takes a variety of organizational forms, and these are often revealing as to the place of women in the group. They range from total control by the women over the management and even the running of the mill, to a far more passive role in which the women pay for a service provided by the men. A well managed mill can cover its costs and depreciation, and even produce a profit, without charging prohibitive prices.

Although the cost of milling is relatively high, the women often take advantage of the time saved to enter into more profitable and less arduous activities (e.g. market gardening, small scale stock raising or cottage industries), which compensate for the expense of milling. It is true that these activities do not always bring in a money income (because they are for home consumption or because there is no market); where this is so, the expense of milling is more visible to the householder, and this seems to lead to unequal access to the mill for women.

The same problem arises with drill holes made to reduce the time and energy expended in pumping. But the cost of a drill hole is very high, as is its depreciation cost, and most groups consider it impossible to cover construction costs or even depreciation.

c. Health

The groups often take charge of the health service, a service that lies at the heart of village life and is visible proof of some kind of development. In principle the service makes

no profit, except insofar as funds are needed to pay a health worker or midwife. The health centers (or "health huts") are very successful in dispensing for minor ailments, but they are often hampered at an early stage by lack of training for their staff. A small village cannot sustain a large health service structure, and time is apparently needed by the groups to establish a balance between what can be treated in the village and what must be sent to the "dispensary". Once this is achieved, the service quickly becomes a natural, integral part of village life.

Many groups were initially formed to set up a health center, but this activity is rarely enough on its own to ensure the group's survival.

d. Other activities meeting specific needs

Some groups have demonstrated their originality in launching specific projects according to how they see development priorities.

For example, when a group formed in the village of Oussouye in Casamance, it built a magnificent crêche, childcare being one of the women's main problems in the rainy season when they are responsible for the rice fields. They had more time available, and at the same time child mortality rates were reduced.

2) Financing local development

With the exception of areas producing agricultural surpluses at remunerative prices, Sahelian farmers have only a limited capacity to save money and finance their own projects. What capacity they have can often be reduced to nothing by a series of drought years. This encourages farmers to manage their activities for the short term only, and so helps perpetuate practices that are destructive to the environment. Outside funding, individual or collective, whether in the form of loans or donations, is often useful in broadly reorienting the farming system towards lasting development.

But while it does have a positive part to play, such funding is necessarily temporary. Care must therefore be taken not to allow farmers to become dependent on these funds; some form of

national credit facility must be provided, either a government scheme or a mutual fund, but based on principles that will make it a lasting project.

2.1) Financing individual activities: local savings and rural credit facilities

a. Rural credit facilities

There are traditional forms of savings and credit in the Sahel countries, the tontines especially. These organizations are efficient in managing social and ceremonial expenses, a function they still fulfill, but they have not proved appropriate for farm investment since their operating cycle is too slow. Informal loans are also very frequent, particularly among family members, but these depend on relationships which are not easily reproduced on a large scale.

In the recent past, apart from the instances mentioned above, "outside" credit operated in two separate ways in the rural Sahel:

- Farmers would borrow from a money lender for their individual needs, food needs in particular. This was relatively expensive, and in many cases finally resulted in the setting up of grain banks or supply stores.

- Input requirement for the farm were generally handled by the State companies, both for cropping season loans to buy seed and inputs and for medium-term loans for machinery.

The second of these two systems usually operated without direct payment: the farmer received his loan in kind, the inputs being issued directly to him and leaving him little choice in the type of product. Repayment was usually deducted automatically from the value of his crop. This type of credit could involve quite large sums, up to 30% of the value of the crop in an irrigated high-input system, and it achieved fairly high rates of repayment since the loan for the following year generally depended on repayment of this year's.

The equipment loans, on the other hand, were repaid in cash and the rate of repayment was low, despite the repayment facilities the farmers were allowed. Governments have often encouraged such failure to pay by periodically cancelling farmers' debts - a habit which, de facto, penalizes the good payers. Much has been said in this connection about "cold money",

outside funds the farmer can use without being held accountable or making any repayment, because the source of this money is distant to him, or because he considers this a fair return on the taxes he pays, ignoring the way this money is spent. But these practices have in the end established some disastrous social habits with regard to government loans, a kind of political patronage in a new form.

At present, State companies in several Sahelian countries are withdrawing from a certain number of activities they consider unprofitable - lending in particular. This withdrawal is more advanced in some countries than in others, but in all cases it is a sufficiently serious threat for farmers' groups to begin thinking about alternative solutions. Broadly speaking, the farmer can take any of three approaches to the problem:

- he can find an alternative source of credit enabling him to use the same service,
- he can provide the service himself, often more cheaply; this will involve many constraints on time and quality (this is the case, for example, with the groundnut grain banks),
- he can do without certain inputs (fertilizers or plant protection products), with all the consequences this may entail.

The first option is generally the most popular, at least while waiting for operational alternatives to the model popularized by the development companies. It is at this point that the problem arises of how rural credit facilities should be organized in the Sahel countries: leaders of local organizations now understand the danger of borrowing from a credit source that may not continue in existence. Rather than seek another easy loan of uncertain future from the same financial partner, they prefer to establish a healthy relationship with a national or local institution dealing specifically with problems of this kind, be it an ordinary bank or an agricultural credit bank like the Crédit Agricole.

This raises the question of whether rural credit facilities can be set up in the Sahel under good conditions since, apart from the bad habits acquired in the past, it should to be remembered that Sahelian agriculture produces little added value, while the unreliable rainfall, which is the main limiting factor in production, does not always allow the farmer to cover input investment costs at existing farm produce prices. With inflation in the neighborhood of 10% a year, a bank can hardly lend at less than 15%. From the standpoint of a conventional bank, therefore,

there are two options: either to lend at economically realistic rates that will discourage certain farming practices, or to operate with artificially low rates.

At best, the second option would fail to remunerate the money handled by the bank and so would discourage savers and channel rural savings towards the towns; at worst it would create a structural deficit that would have to be regularly topped up by the government. This is no solution in the long term, and this option must be used frugally if the aim is independent development in the longer term. Rural credit facilities should therefore be set up on the basis of a genuinely profitable return on money lent since, in the short term at least, professional solidarity between farmers and their capacity for saving are too limited to think in terms of a mutual credit fund or friendly society.

On the other hand, the need to keep interest rates down calls for a reduction in intermediation costs, as these are the only costs that can be cut; they are also fairly high in the present banking system. In particular, such a cut might be possible if the federations of local groups were brought into the credit distribution and repayment circuit.

For the near future, in any case, farmers will find it difficult to procure loans without recourse to an intermediary: it would only be possible if the conventional banks were sufficiently decentralized to be accessible to all. Moreover, administrative formalities have to be fulfilled in French, and many farmers find them hard to manage. Lastly, it is difficult for an individual to provide a mortgage guarantee for his loans when private ownership of the land does not exist, as is the case in most Sahel countries.

Insofar as governments wish to establish as widely accessible a credit system as possible, they will probably have to develop lightweight systems to provide the farmer/bank interface. The question is what form these intermediary structures should take, and on what scale. It is the authors' view that, as experience shows, the best results are achieved at village level, since it is at this level that one finds the strongest solidarity and the strongest social pressure on the individual not to compromise an advantage gained for the whole community. Probably the Crédit Agricole or other banks will have to be satisfied with this form of collective security from the village.

At another level, it is quite possible for the federations to put pressure on the village groups, playing on their recently established solidarity. In some countries, the federations of farmers' groups are already playing an active part in the management of the Crédit Agricole; the FONGS in Senegal, for example, owns shares in the Caisse Nationale de Crédit Agricole.

Coming back to the village level, one may wonder which villages - or village groups - the official banking structures will recognize. Experience shows that it is not always the groups with the most officially recognized status (i.e., the State cooperatives in particular) that function best and show the best rates of repayment. Access to credit therefore raises the problem of the legal and economic status of the groups and their federations. This point will be examined in a later section.

This also raises the broader problem of the ability of the group to act as relay for the authorities, which would mean providing access to certain services not only to group members but to the entire village community, without distinction.

b. Local savings

As with the Crédit Agricole, the idea that Sahelian farmers must make the effort to put by a part of their income as savings is now well anchored in the minds of many group leaders. Below we list some of the difficulties already encountered in practice by farmers' groups, or which seem to us to be imminent.

- As we have already said in connection with the grain banks, householders find themselves today in a situation where their incomes are often in decline, while consumerist pressure from the outside world is increasing. The householder has difficulty in ensuring optimum management of his grain store throughout the year, and it is often even more difficult to put by a part of the household's money income. Group leaders' conviction of the need for savings thus arouses two kinds of reaction:?????

- Some householders take a positive view of the restrictions imposed by collective saving; it enables them to save when on their own, as individuals, they could not.

- Some householders are plainly against this practice.

In a number of cases, when the decision to save has been taken at group level it has been made obligatory. The leaders hope that in the long run everyone will see that the disadvantages are far outweighed by the advantages: greater security, greater autonomy. But some farmers have resigned to avoid this obligation, and the fact that the majority stay with the group does not necessarily mean they are all in favor of this measure. The group provides a whole set of services that are often inseparable one from another, and farmers opt for membership because the "advantages" outweigh the "drawbacks", not because they approve of all the measures taken.

- A second problem is that in the Sahel, where bad harvests recur periodically, several years' savings can be compromised by the needs created by a single bad year, and this is a demotivating factor.

- Thirdly, the groups that undertake ambitious savings schemes are often "advanced" groups with access to several sources of funds. In this situation some members see no practical need for saving, which is partly a symbolic gesture towards self-financing in the long term.

- Where saving is individualized, the problem of the young people is raised. Part of the reason for the flight to the towns is that young people in the countryside want access to simple but non-vital consumer goods - tea, cigarettes, radio/cassette players - and therefore to a money income. Food security alone will not keep the young people from leaving, and cutting down their already meager budgets through savings is perhaps not the best move. Perhaps saving should be first and foremost the responsibility of householders.

- There is another group, however, that should be brought into the savings scheme and its management, and that is the women, who are traditionally very well organized to manage resources. It is a great pity that, to our knowledge, they have little to do with "modern" saving and their methods are not transposed to the "modern" situation.

2.2) Financing group activities (self-financing, project aid, discretionary funds)

The farmers' groups often undertake projects of a more or less technical kind, with outside support which generally takes the form of financial support. Some groups also receive help for

the everyday running of their organization.

As a rule, a group that has been in existence for a few years will be receiving funds from various sources, often very varied types of funds. These funds may determine the group's future. It seems appropriate, therefore, to examine where they come from and the logic by which they operate.

There are three types of sources of finance

a) project aid (funding from outside, tied to the implementation of a specific project),

b) outside aid not tied to a project but with conditions imposed,

c) Self-financing by the organization.

a) Finance from outside, tied to the implementation of a specific project is the most common form, but seems increasingly open to question. It shifts the center of decision-making about the life of the group outside that group, as the agreement of the financing institution has to be obtained in advance. This makes the donors all powerful in its dealings with the organization. Even if the donor's ethics prevent it from using too heavy a guiding hand in the conception and aims of the project, the group's representative will sometimes try to adopt what he believes to be the funding party's conception, rather than express the group's real needs in their natural order.

Conversely, once the funds have been obtained for a given objective, there is little incentive to optimize their utilization since all that counts is to achieve the intended result. This is all the more damaging when the group's leaders, aware that funding for a precise purpose is often granted only once, are tempted to overestimate the costs so as to be prepared for any eventuality. Lastly, this form of funding obviously lacks flexibility: it can take no account of events that might modify the organization's needs or objectives between the start of the negotiations and the completion of the project. The project as planned, even if it has lost all or part of its relevance, will be implemented willy nilly since the funds are there for it anyway and to turn them down or use them for another purpose would often be to invite the wrath of the funding body which, in many cases, is itself answerable for the application of funds it is distributing on behalf of a third party.

This system does not seem to be the best possible, therefore. It concentrates all reflection and negotiation (very important for the life of the organization) at the beginning of the project. It obviously does not facilitate continuous assessment of the project and the group's needs and aims, even if it does not entirely preclude it. The farmers are reduced to mere technicians in their own development. For at the technical level this type of scheme is not especially questionable: technically, it usually achieves the intended result, and very many projects have been implemented by this means. But it is far more contestable as regards the creativity of the organizations, their adaptability, their ability to optimize satisfaction of their needs with a given budget - all of which are indispensable if they hope one day to be independent, since their necessarily modest budget will have to be very effectively utilized.

b) In this respect, the second type of outside funding seems more promising. This type of scheme, one good example of which is the NGO 6S in Burkina Faso or Senegal, consists of providing an organization with finance not for a specific project to be defined in advance, but subject to certain conditions. With 6S, 50% of the amount involved must be used for economic action, the amount lent must be greater than the amount donated, and the organization must apply a rigidly imposed method of accounting so that a post facto check can be kept on its operations. This check will decide whether the financing is to continue the following year. It is also agreed at the outset that the financing should diminish year by year to reach zero after seven or eight years.

Obviously this type of financing is not neutral, but it is more flexible than the first. 6S defines a framework of conditions it considers indispensable for development according to its conception of it; but within this framework, the organization has considerable latitude to develop as it wishes. In fact group leaders who use this system are unanimous in praising it and hope it will spread. However, although a fund of this kind is very useful because it is readily available, and although the conditions imposed on its use make it suitable for projects in the local economy, it has its drawbacks. For example, most organizations also receive funds earmarked for specific projects, including infrastructure projects, in the form of unconditional donations; this obviously limits the educational value of 6S's approach to financing, which affects only 6S funds and not all the funds held by the organization. For the system to be wholly coherent, this flexible financing should be the organization's sole source of funds.

The main point to emerge from this is that organization leaders want unconditional financing, for which they are ready to take full responsibility, given the difficulty of obtaining even a moderate sum quickly. The pace at which financing is distributed has more to do with the financing institutions' schedules than with the rhythm of the farming year, and does not allow for optimum responses to the problems of the farmer.

c) Lastly, all the organizations partly finance their own activities: the financing institution often demands "local-counterpart financing", and group leaders are also beginning to fell that their organizations should find funds of their own if they wish to become more independent. But while the will to do so is often expressed, it has not yet fully manifested itself in practice. The level of self-financing is generally low, and lower still for the larger organizational structures; in some of the large federations it is less than 10%. Two questions should be raised here:

- The independent funds the organizations need must be in money form: yet all too often, the organization's share of the budget is based on an assessment of labor input, the harvest from the collective fields and other contributions in kind. However great this contribution, it is not enough: the organizations must be able to finance their projects and maintain their organizational structure, not merely top up the aid received. To achieve this they need money, not just labor supplied by members. But membership subscriptions seem to be far less acceptable to farmers than collective labor.

- There is also the question of which activities can reasonably be expected to achieve financial independence - although this is not a criterion for judging the worth of the activity in the present circumstances. Economic activities and the services connected with it are often already financially independent, donations being used only to set up the initial fund. "Social" services like millet mills and water pumps, once their value is demonstrated, create momentum through which they may reach the stage of operating independently, provided strict management habits are acquired. But these various services together involve considerable running expenses and depreciation costs, offset in the farmers' eyes by the immediate advantages of the service.

Under these conditions, the main remaining doubt involves training and group leadership activities, which are generally heavily subsidized. Are the farmers prepared to take charge of these activities rather than let them die out, if the choice is

clearly put to them? To date this has been doubtful. Nor is it certain that the group leaders wish to present the choice clearly, since for some of them their training and group leadership activities are a source of power, prestige and even revenue.

A possible solution is that in the long run, management of the different activities might be "individualized" and only those activities that meet a real need would become permanent, the others dying out naturally. For this selection process to take place, there must be no confusion between the different activities: on the contrary, management must be decentralized as far as possible, the organization doing no more than to coordinate the smooth running of the activities. In this way each activity could be judged in its own right by all the parties involved, though a capacity for long- and medium-term thinking will be required if longer-term benefits are not to be sacrificed in favor of the short term.

2.3) Relations with the financing institutions

Relations between the groups and the financing institutions are relatively healthy and increasingly demonstrate a real form of partnership. Financial dependence still exists, of course, but in view of the large number of financing institutions in existence, the huge amount of aid proposed, the fact that the groups generally offer better utilization of the funds than other cooperation operations, and the emerging but largely tacit recognition that this aid must become a supplement to development rather than the very basis of development, the organizations are in a position of relative strength in their dealings with their partners.

It is rather unfortunate that this partnership sometimes involves only the group leader, to the exclusion of the grass-roots members, who are often more ready to accept large amounts of financing for the sake of the organization's short-term economic efficacy, which is their main concern, at the expense of medium- and long-term considerations.

There is also a need to promote technical criteria to help financing institutions choose where to become involved, to mitigate the very subjective nature of what are often negotiations between individuals, in which too much can be decided by the rhetoric and charm of an effective leader-negotiator. A good leader in this sense will often have to set his own limit to the funds he is prepared to accept, as the

financing resources seem inexhaustible and the object to be financed seems a secondary consideration. From this viewpoint, making the farmers' groups more independent, efficient and productive means first and foremost rationalizing their economic environment and the nature of their partnership with the financing institutions.

For example, when an NGO sets up a village irrigation system it often donates the first pump unit, specifying that allowance must be made for depreciation of the machine so that it can be replaced when the time comes. In fact, groups with village irrigation systems often do not cover the depreciation of their pump. This is not because economic logic escapes them, but because they are certain - often quite rightly - that if the pump breaks they will find another donor to give them another pump. In that situation, economic logic for the group means redistributing as much of its profits as possible without allowing for depreciation of the capital equipment.

It is now common knowledge that some financing institutions, through media success or other reasons, have far more money to give away than their partners can effectively manage, and they sometimes distribute this money in ways that can invite over-consumption and bad economic habits on the part of the partner organizations.

At a given moment each group certainly has the capacity to convert a certain level of investment into genuine development. Below this level there is a danger of demotivation; above it, there is an increased danger that the funds will not be utilized as effectively as they might in terms of development priorities; these necessarily temporary funds can also seem deceivingly easy to obtain.

2.4) The structure of group expenditure; future prospects for group budgets and resources and the withdrawal of the financing institutions; consequences for the group and its members

For both grass-roots organizations and federations it may be useful to examine the structure of expenditure in detail, as this should indicate channels of thought for the economic future of these organizations. Expenses break down into loans, investments involving short-, medium- or long-term depreciation, and running expenses. In the grass-roots organizations, running expenses are generally fairly low except where heavy machinery such as pumps units are involved, and are usually managed fairly well provided there is a good level of awareness and a good management capacity. The federations, on the other hand, incur considerable

running expenses, usually for activities that are not directly profitable: coordination (vehicle expenses), training, etc. These expenses are largely subsidized by the funding bodies. The possibility of reproducing these activities without access to subsidies may be doubtful, and this is one of the weak points of the larger structures, whose base is not yet strong enough to support them materially.

It also seems that many organizations have not yet learned to handle the technique of revolving credits, since in their budget programs very few of them take account of the money they should be receiving under this system (an outside body lends to individuals, and part of the repayment goes to the group). And yet this system, now used by many donors, should, if rates of repayment are sufficiently high, eventually constitute solid working capital for the organizations receiving the funds.

3) The farmers' group: a social and cultural transformation and a vector of change in rural areas

The farmers' group, as we saw above, is a vector of change in both technical and economic terms. But it is also a social and cultural transformation in itself, which creates new needs and opens up new social and cultural possibilities for the future.

3.1) Situation at the local level

a. Diversity of organizations

As has been repeated on numerous occasions, Sahelian farmers' organizations are very diverse in nature, ranging from the small quasi-traditional farmers' groups formed to carry out a specific tasks, to the large, multi-village organizations that attempt to handle all the problems facing the rural world. Throughout this spectrum of types of groups and organizations, organizational models are also very diverse, as are the consequences on the day-to-day lives of the communities affected by them. Like earlier sections, this part of the report cannot claim to be exhaustive in its discussion of possibilities open to farmers' groups, nor can the conclusions drawn here necessarily be extrapolated to all situations throughout the region. An

attempt is made to point to the main trends, and to indicate a number of problems that have already arisen or that could arise in the future. Any further analysis at this stage would be fraught with danger.

b. Major organizational trends

Two main organizational trends have been detected in large numbers of farmers' groups, from the grass-roots organizations involving a single village or a single neighborhood of a larger village, to the major federations that can cover an entire region:

- In certain instances, the aim is to gain credibility through large membership and attempts are made to ensure that large numbers of persons become members of the group. These groups tend to aim for general consensus and organization is fairly close to that of traditional bodies, offering a "soft approach" to joint action based on wide agreement among members. The approach offers a chance for the attitudes of the whole group to change, but this change is often slow because it is difficult to ally consensus with rapid development. Small village-level groups whose members are already linked through other activities tend to be relatively dynamic, while larger groups (federations) are considerably less dynamic because it is difficult to reach consensus on the action that should be taken. In the long term, this type of group could be instrumental in bringing harmonious development, provided the requisite level of economic efficiency is reached.

- Other organizations tend to place more emphasis on effective action and rapid development. Here, the determination to act often comes from a small group of leaders, whom the target group follows to a greater or lesser extent. In terms of short-term effectiveness an aspect to which the donors are particularly sensitive this type of organization often achieves better results that those mentioned above. In the longer term, various risks exist. If development is too rapid, certain members might voluntarily or involuntarily leave the group. And as soon as a given movement addresses the needs or objectives of only part of the target group, the end result changes. Such organizations can lead to the training of a new rural elite made up of a small minority of pioneer farmers. The problem faced then is whether that elite has the momentum to lead the rest of the rural population, or whether its economic future will be detached from that of the other members of the community. It could be argued that farmers' groups have a

critical mass, beneath which it is not a matter of local development, but rather of the development of certain individuals within a given community.

These two trends are not mutually exclusive. Many group leaders seek both community action and effective development. In practice, however, priority is generally given to one of these two goals. It is conceivable for two organizational trends to lead to the same result, but the possibility of these two paths producing markedly different results cannot be ruled out.

c. The role of the leaders

In practice, priorities are rarely fixed at grass-roots level, but rather by a team of leaders, and often by a single person. The farmer can merely underwrite the organization by deciding whether or not to participate, and that depends largely on social and economic benefits and disadvantages. In this way, the team of leaders can cause a farmer to act in a way that he would not have acted spontaneously, even if he was already aware of the issues in hand, on the ground that the consequences of such action seem less harmful than becoming marginalized by the group or excluded from it. In theory, this pressure exerted by the group on the individual should be counterbalanced by the individual's right to reply. Although all groups claim to be working towards the involvement of each and every member in the decisions that are made, and although this principle is often applied, effective participation is no more than a distant goal in many instances.

The leader is often an exceptional figure in the village, either through his social status, or because he has studied or travelled.

Further, the group or organization brings the leader into contact with large numbers of people and obliges him to take responsibilities, both within the rural society and with donor organizations. The burden on such an individual is clearly very heavy, but leading a group is also very effective training, and the gap between the abilities of the farmer and the leader to analyze and assimilate information is continuing to widen as time goes by. It is thus difficult to speak of a truly democratic process, since the gap is too large: the democratic process is often reduced to the leader explaining the steps he wishes to take to the members of his group. It is important for the leader to ensure that his members understand his ideas, and the members

must be able to control the leader. Often the leader is assisted by "sub-leaders", who are his lieutenants and disciples, but who generally make little critical analysis of what the leader does.

The leader thus has very large powers. He forms the interface between two very different cultures and is responsible not only for forging links between the two, but also in part for the trauma that such links can cause. Indeed, the leader is often the only member of the group with a specific project in view and the wherewithal to ensure that project is carried out within both cultures.

It would be reasonable to argue that a farmers' group headed by a powerful leader is a good way of introducing modernity to rural communities quickly and in an organized fashion. The notion of speed is linked to the power and charisma of the leader and is of fundamental importance: other methods of introducing modernity to rural communities are expedient but can have a disruptive effect and can be in competition with the farmers' groups. Further, it can be argued that, although centralized power is often an advantage when initiating a change (despite the obvious risks of producing an uncontrollable snowball effect), once the change has started to take root, everything possible should be done to ensure that subsequent management and handing-down of knowledge involve the entire community and are carried out in a democratic fashion. In this respect, training farmers at grass-roots level is indispensable.

d. The importance of training and the role of information

Leaders constantly express the need for training for themselves and for their members; this need is also expressed at grass-roots level. Indeed, training is one of the points on which a wide consensus is almost always reached. But literacy education is often an indispensable prerequisite and effective training can thus only be achieved through sustained action.

Moreover, in an effort to guarantee a certain level of effectiveness, purely technical training is sometimes given priority, to the detriment of group-leadership and management education. Little group-leadership and management training is carried out even within the larger organizations, although many federations bring together large numbers of group leaders who are likely to be interested in such initiatives. Indeed, training sessions in group-leadership, accounting, management and short-term planning have already met with considerable success.

Access to extensive information should also be a major objective for farmers' groups. As has been said before, information is one of the driving forces behind the training of leaders, and forms the basic system of reference within which each leader constructs his own project or development plan. Information must be extensive, but we consider that priority should be placed on meetings involving a full range of farmers' groups should be held: such meetings are very often equally valued as an opportunity of exchanging general information as for examination of the technical aspects for which they are organized. Another important aspect involves information on the administration, its role, its possibilities and its shortcomings, for such information is the key to a more rational relationship between the farmers and the administration.

The impact of radio broadcasts in local languages underlines the need and points to the consequences of the wide dissemination of information.

e. The position and role of women and young people

Women

Women currently seem to play a smaller role than they could, particularly in view of their numbers and the important part they play in productive activities. It must be remembered that in the traditional context, the feminine condition is highly specific, and from this point of view the position they enjoy in farmers' groups represents considerable progress in itself, as they often admit themselves. But even if women are increasingly expressing themselves and voicing their opinions, they generally have less responsibility than men of similar ability. In mixed groups, the women have a president, but posts involving the entire group are generally filled by men.

The situation is similar in activities such as savings: although women's traditional involvement is considerably more developed, it is the men who set up and manage the savings system. In fact, there is still a long way to go before women enjoy their rightful position within the farmers' groups (where they often form the majority). Even group leaders, many of whom are very sensitive to Western models of progress, do not always consider the advancement of women to be a priority.

A determination to ensure that women participate in the farmers' groups is not always sufficient. The leader of the organization Soxaana Fedde in Senegal has said that despite the statutory presence of women at meetings, they do not participate. To ease dialogue between men and women, this association is now organizing talk-shops for different age groups, in which cultural barriers are less strong.

In certain places, and often depending on local culture, all-women groups exist alongside all-men groups. These women's groups generally demonstrate a remarkable level of dynamism and good internal organization. But the autonomy of such groups is not always welcomed by the men.

Young people

It is interesting to examine the position enjoyed in the farmers' groups by young people in the African sense of the term, i.e., unmarried young people. Not only do young people form the majority of the rural population, but they are also more mobile and more sensitive to the lure of the cities. As such, young people are the key to understanding and controlling the rural exodus. They nonetheless have a very specific position in the farmers' groups. Like women, young people traditionally have their own associations that exist alongside the farmers' group. But they are often also integrated in the main organization and play an important role because some of them are literate a rare phenomenon among older members of the population. The younger generation is at the center of recent technical and cultural changes and is better equipped to assimilate those changes. The farmers' group offers young people much greater real power than the traditional society, offering them the chance to manage finances, and to build and partly control their future: this has a very positive psychological effect and enables them to improve their self-image.

However, this power is not always sufficient to keep young people in the village, and outside operators prefer to train young married people, who are considered stabilized and thus less likely to migrate.

Training and rural exodus: a director of a Maison Familiale Rurale has spoken of his dilemma. Theoretically, he should have trained young people in all the activities likely to be of use in the villages in an effort to increase their autonomy. However, experience showed that young people trained in a discipline that

is not strictly agricultural (metalwork, carpentry, etc.) showed a strong tendency to leave the village to make use of their training in the cities. The director was keen to fight the rural exodus rather than promote integrated rural development and now only offers directly agriculture- or livestock-related training.

Finally, girls' groups should not be overlooked. The young unmarried women that are members of these groups play a very minor role in the farmers' groups: girls marry young and only remain in these groups for a limited period before joining the women's groups.

f. The farmers' group in the human and traditional context

As we have said, the roots of the farmers' groups are often to be found in the traditional rural society of Africa, and this fact is part of the reason for their success. Nevertheless, the farmers' group has elements of modernity that allow it to overcome certain divisions or even blockages in traditional society.

For example, recent decades have seen an economic dimension appear to the traditional hierarchy, with increasing monetarization allowing certain less privileged groups - who were for that matter more mobile and enterprising - to become wealthier. Few of these groups have managed to assume a new position in traditional society, despite their new-found economic pull. As an essential element in quasi-traditional village life, the farmers' group can offer these people a chance to play new roles at the local level. Efforts are being made in this direction, but can flounder in face of prejudice.

More generally, the farmers' groups seems to offer a gentle introduction to modernity, and this role justifies the group's influence on local community life. The most dynamic of the group's members can introduce modernity from within. Midway between traditional life and the future, the farmers' groups is proclaiming its role of reformer at a time when changes are inevitable.

In addition, certain groups are clearly divorced from typical traditional organization. The success of these groups is closely linked to the services and benefits (particularly economic) that they offer their members.

The ADRK in Burkina Faso, for example, relies on an organizational model that is quite different from traditional society, and has a plainly economic role. This association

attracted large numbers of members because it offered attractive credit terms for equipment acquisition.

3.2) Farmers' groups, federations and the self-organization movement: a choice of models for the Sahelian countries

a. Competition or interaction between the groups and local government?

At present, the relationships between farmers' groups and local government vary considerably. In the not-too-distant past, little was known about the first farmers' groups, and in certain instances they were considered potentially disruptive and existed apart from official channels. Times have changed; but certain problems have remained.

The administration - even at grass-roots level - has now become aware of the self-organization movement, realizes it already has considerable importance, and recognizes its potential for growth in the future. As a result, local officials are taking an interest in the farmers' groups in various ways. Conversely, leaders of farmers' groups are gradually becoming aware of the role they could play - federatively - at the government level in the Sahel as well as elsewhere. Group leaders now recognize the need at least to be recognized by the administration, or at best to work hand in hand with it.

Certain farmers' groups invite official representatives to attend their meetings, and even their general assemblies. Similarly, certain federations are divided into categories in the same way as the administration, even when these categories do not correspond to the socio-cultural breakdown of traditional society.

However, any examination of this trend must be kept in proportion. In many cases, relations between the farmers' groups and the local administration are tenuous: logistically, the administration might not be capable of fulfilling its public-service role, and there might be a certain mistrust between the farmers and the administration. There are clear historical reasons for this mistrust, which will not be discussed further here. On the other hand, it is worth pointing out that the farmers' groups that work most closely with the administration are the best equipped to discuss issues with its representatives. Indeed, the major farmers' groups are sometimes better equipped than the administration and more technically

advanced than local technical services. They are in a position to call upon the administration to act on specific matters without losing control of the global future of the group.

The groups that are emerging or that feel they are in a position of weakness are afraid that the administration will monopolize their group. It must be recognized that there is a real risk of administrative intervention, for the self-organization movement now collects large amounts of money. It is a great temptation for a local official with a responsibility to promote development work but without the credit facilities he needs to act to seek control of project money or to try to make development projects help run his own department.

Be that as it may, new relationships are emerging at the local level between organized farmers and the administration, where the farmers look to the administration as a genuine public service. When local civil servants are allowed to contribute meaningfully to local community life, many of them turn out to be motivated by their work and are ready to seek the same objectives as the farmers' groups. Whenever a farmers' group is sure of its own strengths and of its capacity to negotiate, it should not hesitate in approaching the local public services, so that its objectives are taken into account by all local decision-makers, even if the stages of the decision-making process that are involved are very variable.

b. Local and national coordination of farmers' groups: technical and political aspects

Many groups are not insular, but form part of a federation. The term "federation" has been used on numerous occasions in the preceding chapters, but closer attention will now be paid to this phenomenon, and to the origins of federations of farmers' groups, which are of three types:

- In certain cases, all the farmers' groups in the federation originally worked with the same outside NGO. This has given them a chance to exchange views and experiences, and in general has instilled the same approach to work in the different groups. NGOs often encourage the creation of federations to ensure continuity after their departure. There are nonetheless a number of risks involved: on the one hand, after the departure of the NGO, the federation has a much weaker logistical infrastructure than the expatriates, and this prevents them from effectively catalyzing exchanges between member groups in different parts of the region covered; on the

other hand, expatriates who encourage the formation of multiple groups are generally unaware of affinities and rivalries between villages. Once the NGOs have left, inter-village tensions might rise and the future of the federation can be compromised as a result. However, one of the advantages of such federations is that they are underwritten by the NGO, and they are thus less liable to be considered suspect by the administration.

- In other cases, the groups are all offshoots of the same "parent" group, whose example has been reproduced on numerous occasions. There are many instances of this process, which often results in peer-emulation within the federation, and in the de facto consolidation of the power of the leader of the "parent" group. Indeed, emulation rarely tends to be spontaneous, and is often connected to the stance adopted by the original leader. Originally member groups voluntarily seek the same objectives, and a federation is formed later through a natural process.

- In yet other cases, the federation brings together groups that formerly existed quite independently. These federations probably offer the most resourceful exchanges, but they are also the most conflictual, for the leaders of the member groups often have different convictions. Another problem with these federations is that newly formed groups that want to take part in the federation often find it hard to express their identity amid other groups that forcefully affirm their own.

It is often surprising to see how dynamic the federations are. Although certain federations still have little more than a formal existence, their utility is nonetheless widely accepted in principle, and, in many parts of the Sahel, many individuals are ready to fight to make the federations truly operational. In this respect there is wide disparity between different countries: the same is true of the self-organization movement in general, but it is particularly striking at the federation level. It is also probable that the policies that governments have adopted and continue to adopt have added to the groups' determination to federate or to work in this direction. Finally, it is likely that in each country the movement depends on a handful of individuals who are able at the right time to harness existing energy and catalyze moves to create and lead new organizations.

In certain countries of the Sahel, national federations are beginning to emerge, often in the form of federations of federations. In some countries there is just one such organization, while in other countries several already exist. But the creation of these national federations in many cases seems to

be a logical part of the federative process mentioned above. Although national federations still do not represent the majority of farmers in any Sahelian country, they are very likely to be called upon to play a major role at some time in the future. Two approaches are possible in this respect: certain observers feel that the process should not be unduly hastened but that regional federations should be allowed to consolidate before moving into the next phase; while others consider that the need for national federations has existed for too long already and that regional federations urgently require the services that only a national federation can offer. The debate remains open.

The debate is also open as to whether the federations - at whatever level - should perform a technical role or a political role. At the local level, these two roles are inextricably interwoven, but the greater the degree of organization is, the greater will be the difference between the financial, organizational and human resources needed to effectively perform these two roles. Both roles are ultimately indispensable, but it remains to be seen which role will assume dominance in the short-term future. We are told that the movement is aiming to establish a service superstructure offering training, funds, supplies of inputs and rural finance, but the political aspect of the movement seems to be attracting a number of farmers' leaders, and this is only natural. One may wonder what relationship there would be between such organizations and the State: cooperation or joint management is a delicate business when opposition is more outspoken than most Sahelian governments are prepared to accept and when party-political manipulation could discredit the organizations in the eyes of their grass-roots members.

c. Legal status of farmers' groups

An initial step towards better coordination between organizations and governments could be taken by renegotiating the legal status of the farmers' groups. In most countries, these groups only can choose between the status of State cooperative and that of sports, cultural and leisure association (when the latter exists). Neither of these statuses meets the needs of organized farmers, for the farmers are seeking considerably more room for maneuver. There is thus an urgent need to recognize the freedom of association and the economic role of the farmers' groups by creating a suitable status and by making it widely available.

The State could specify legal regulations on the conditions that the farmers' groups must meet to avoid clashes with national policies - such is the role of the State - and then allow the

farmers the freedom to organize themselves within that framework, without unduly tight controls, and with the possibility of acting as economic operators. Only by offering a new status will the blatant divorce between legal status and activities cease to exist.

Simplified statutes the farmers' groups would also overcome the debilitating legal headaches that afflict certain organizations that endeavor to act strictly within the current legal framework. An example of this problem has been seen in an association created by young "intellectuals" to maintain ties with their village.

C. SYNOPSIS

1) Strengths and weaknesses of the farmers' groups

1.1) Farmers' groups, agricultural development and rural development

As the foregoing has attempted to show, the farmers' group is both a source and a vector of development. It should be remembered that no single definition of "development" exists, for there are a multitude of possible kinds of development. Can it be said that the farmers' group brings a particular kind of development? As shown above, there are many organizational possibilities with different probable consequences. A group's technical activities will also introduce models that could shape tomorrow's society in the rural Sahel. It is therefore important for the groups, their leaders, and also the donors, to be aware of all the implications of the activities they initiate.

In the Sahel, where deterioration of the environment is becoming an ever greater threat, it is important to promote the farming methods that are the most suitable for local conditions, methods that will treat the environment with more respect. It is also important to promote forms of production that are less dependent on natural conditions, and others that will generate cash revenues.

Working through a federation may be ideal for disseminating new crops; but if the new crop yields a marketable product, the same mechanism will turn against its usual beneficiaries, since there will very soon be over-production of the new crop and it will be difficult to market locally. This is especially true for vegetables, which are difficult to conserve.

Uniformity of behavior within one federation may in some cases foster the rapid dissemination of technical progress, but in the long run it will most probably prove a limitation that will need to be overcome, as each group needs its own capacity to take initiatives.

In rural areas, from which so many young people depart each year for the city, it is also important to think beyond agricultural development to rural development: new activities, new occupations, new responsibilities, each one an incentive for a bored young person to stay in the village. The problem is that up to now, very few alternatives to traditional crops have been found: to survive, the groups will also have to develop a greater capacity for innovation than is generally apparent at present.

Despite the fact that the organizations often have a markedly collective way of working, they will also have to leave room for individual enterprise rather than collectivize all local activities, agricultural or not.

1.2) The farmers' group: a transitory instrument or a new form of social organization?

In its most common local form, the farmers' group is a quiet revolution, adopting elements of the traditional structures but changing their purpose. The group and its leader are quite certainly precious instruments for a village community faced with an imperative need to adapt very radically and to do so in the least damaging way. But should the group become a new institution, a new form of social organization?

When we talk about the permanence of the groups, it would be useful to clarify whether we are talking about permanence in the face of the obstacles that are inherent in change, or permanence in absolute terms. It is the author's view that in the long run, the group that introduces change will eventually lose its function, and that at that stage the task of managing the achievements of the group will require a looser and less restrictive type of structure, but one that is non-exclusive and more democratic.

The group's activities will probably then split up into smaller structures providing services for which a real need exists.

Seen in this light, the group has a pioneering part to play, but in the long run a village institution should take over the management of the group's achievements, acting on behalf of the entire community with a view to furthering decentralized development.

1.3) Self-assessment and forward-looking analysis in the groups

Collective reflexion - which at present is the very essence of the farmers' group - is essential vehicle for two group activities in particular: retrospective analysis or self-assessment, and forward-looking analysis and scheduling of projects. For these two activities collective reflexion should become a permanent feature.

A forward-looking approach is essential to any group that hopes to take effective control of its future. The main purpose of training, for example, should be to lead the group members on from implementation of specific projects to the realization of a more general plan for the future. And when forward-looking analysis is used to develop a plan of action, in the particular context of the Sahel this plan must always include two features: optimum planning which (assuming that external variables remain constant) will optimize local conditions for development, and a minimum planning which, in the event of an ecological disaster (which is not to be ruled out) will ensure that the progress made so far is not lost.

Self-assessment (i.e., critical examination of the group's past action) is a very delicate exercise, but much can be learned from it and it will complement forward-looking analysis if it is not a prerequisite for it. Self-assessment often seems to be neglected by the groups; they rarely seem to compare their results with their intentions at the outset, even when the gap between the two is clearly enormous. Self-assessment might provide the group with the wherewithal to understand itself; and one of the main functions of outside institutions might be to hold up a mirror to the group in an effort to initiate the process of self-assessment.

1.4) Is self-development possible?

The concept of self-development is often mentioned by both farmers' organizations and their support organizations. Indeed, the latter usually set up projects to last three or four years, at the end of which the group is supposed to be able to stand on its own feet. But this remains a very distant goal: how can one expect a farmers' group, after three years and often massive investments, to take up the reins, consolidate the progress already made and find its own funds to invest at a later stage?

There are obviously cases where this does work, but it is more usual for it to take ten years for development to get under way. It would seem unrealistic to argue otherwise.

An initial goal should thus be community control over development. At this initial stage, the group should make a careful assessment of the limits and implications of its action in technical, organizational and economic terms. It is only at the next stage that the group can strive to attain self-development, since only then will it be capable of managing what it has already achieved and collectively finding the resources it will need to invest in further development.

2) Recommendations for support of the farmers' groups

2.1) Recommendations to aid agencies

A) Think about methods of financing local development; expand the use of flexible funds especially; open up new procedures based on new intermediaries.

B) Agree to simplify and unify procedures for funding requests and financial accounting, while maintaining a wide range of types of credit.

C) At the local level, offer access to funds that can be released rapidly for specific requests for aid that may be of considerable importance to the beneficiaries.

D) Bear in mind that the farmers' groups and rural organizations, while they do represent a promising channel for cooperation, cannot absorb large amounts of financing quickly without endangering their identity and viability.

E) Reconsider the duration of local development financing projects. Some projects may need funding for periods as long as ten years.

F) Increase the group leaders' capacity to manage well and to think ahead, and do not hesitate to finance training despite the low visibility of this type of investment.

G) Foster communication between groups at the regional or national levels; disseminate information in the villages about organizational and technical possibilities. Initiate motivating small-scale projects, with economic objectives and strong support, to catalyze the human potential for organization and environmental management.

H) Ensure coordination and greater coherence between the different donors involved in the same area. Avoid the kind of competition that sometimes arises.

I) Find an appropriate form of coordination with the authorities, who will not take a back seat in local development movements without reacting. Develop with the authorities and the groups concerned an objective definition of the financing priorities for projects and groups, in line with national development plans.

J) Do not help set up structures without making sure they can be viable in the longer term without outside support, except where the structure is a response to a strictly temporary need.

2.2) Recommendations to Sahelian government authorities

A) Help portray a positive image of the Sahelian farmer, particularly through the media and in arbitration between town and country, so that farmers can feel proud of their condition.

B) Establish a relationship of partnership with the farmers' groups and rural organizations at all levels, based on recognition of the fact that the Sahelian governments cannot properly manage the whole of their country's development, and need the wholehearted support of the rural population groups to attain their common objective.

C) Give the village communities better control over the future of their lands, including the forests; and decentralize power as much as possible.

D) Send out to the countryside highly motivated, competent, well equipped development officers; foster quality of recruitment rather than numbers; improve the image of these officers.

E) Formulate new kinds of legal status for the farmers' organization, taking into account their economic role, and make the new statuses widely available. Keep these types of status very flexible.

F) Ensure that farm produce prices leave a margin for the farmer; set up a structure for forward-looking analysis of domestic and export markets, publicize the results widely and enable farmers to optimize the profitability of their work.

3) Recommendations to farmers' groups and rural organizations

A) Design projects according to a clearly stated conception of community development. Consider action within a medium-term context and not in terms of financing opportunities; start from the actual capacities of the milieu rather than copying models from elsewhere.

B) Develop economic activities involving agriculture and other aspects of rural life; foster organization of collectively managed services for the individual consumer, allowing each to progress at his or her own speed; leave room for individual enterprise and ensure that there are incomes for young people.

C) Fight the natural tendency for the gap between group leaders and grass-roots members to widen; in the long run this gap can only compromise the survival of the group.

D) Manage the different group activities separately, so as to be able to assess the impact of each activity at any moment (though not necessarily its financial profitability). Regularly compare initial objectives with the results obtained. Ensure stricter management.

E) Avoid projects that clearly cannot be self-financing in the long run, unless they meet a strictly temporary need.

F) Cooperate with the national institutions, while stating the group's overall plan in clear terms.

THE DYNAMICS OF ORGANIZATION IN THE RURAL SAHEL

Farmers' groups and rural organizations: limits and potential

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Club du Sahel

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