Institutional Architecture and Pro-Poor Growth in the Office du Niger: Responses from Farmer Organizations

A Pilot Study

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This pilot study shows that the farmer organizations (FOs) were not able to adapt themselves in an adequate way to the new institutional architecture of the Office du Niger (ON). Sustainable answers to a range of members’ concerns could not be achieved. These included the drop in the price of production materials, the reduction of revenues from the water license and from the interest rates of the agricultural credit, issues of land security, the increase in price of rice and the lack of social cohesion. This failure generated a social climate unfavourable to the partnerships between farmers and between the FOs and the ON that led to the contesting of legal institutions.

We will show how the FOs suffered multiple constraints which blocked their effective functioning. The intervention of the State and the ON will be required to lift these constraints. Our study also reveals that, in their fight for the improvement of family farms, the farmers entered into conflict with the ON over the implementation of new rules. The solution to these conflicts can be found in a closer reading of the decree of management, in particular of the systems of land tenure and license payment.
1. **Introduction**

Governments and aid agencies committed to reducing rural poverty have made vast investment in canal irrigation but performance has usually fallen far short of expectations. Millions of poor households who should have benefited have not done so. To improve the anti-poverty performance of canal irrigation systems is now one of the great practical and intellectual challenges facing humankind.

Robert Chambers

Located at the centre of Mali, the Office du Niger is the largest hydro-agricultural entity created by the French Colonial Administration in French-speaking Western Africa. It was created in 1932 following the 1925 discovery of a fossil delta in the centre of Mali, the Niger Central Delta. At its creation, it presented an irrigable potential of about 1.5 million hectares of land, with a forecast of 960,000 rehabilitated hectares in 50 years. However, after 75 years the ON has only developed 82,000 hectares of rehabilitated and farmed surfaces, 7% of the expected objective.

When created, the ON's main objectives were: (i) to satisfy the cotton need of the French textile industry and (ii) to guarantee food security in rice of the Sahelian regions of the French Empire of Western Africa. In 1971, under the military regime of Mali, the agro-industrial complex abandoned cotton production and specialized in the production of rice. The objective was to improve the income and the standard of living of farmers, to ensure the food self-sufficiency of the country and to combat desertification.

It was already clear in the 1970s that the ON was far from reaching its irrigable land potential. In addition, the already equipped lands were in decline with a deteriorating hydraulic network and paddy's average returns per hectare at their lowest level (1.6 tons/ha). The farmers' situation worsened due to a general decline in production and monetary incomes as well as the overuse of land and the precariousness of land tenure. Therefore in 1977 the Government of Mali requested support from international sponsors - for the physical, institutional and financial rehabilitation of the ON. From 1987 to 1996 an important programme of technical rehabilitation of the ON's infrastructure was undertaken. The result was encouraging: more than 20,000 hectares of rehabilitated lands and an average output of 6 tons/ha of paddy. The intervention of the Netherlands through the programme 'Improvement of the Production of Rice in the Office du Niger' or ARPON (Amélioration de la Riziculture Paysanne à l’Office du Niger) during the 1980s was decisive in the success of this rehabilitation. ARPON gave priority to the training of managers and farmers, to the intensification of rice production through the introduction of more productive types of rice and to the dissemination of technical agricultural expertise.

According to the Study of the Master Development plan for the Zone of the Office du Niger 2004 (**Etude du Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement de l’ON, 2004**), the current rehabilitated zone covers a surface of 9,740 km² for approximately 306,000 inhabitants with a high average density of 31.3 inhabitants/km².

**Demographic Information 2003–2004**

| Number of villages | 249 |
| Number of families | 26,435 |
| Total population | 350,079 |
| Male | 174,471 |
| Female | 175,608 |

(Around 100 inhabitants/km² in southern Kala, Niono zone)

According to the Study of the Master development plan for the Zone of the Office du Niger 2004 (**Etude du Schéma Directeur d’Aménagement de l’ON, 2004**), the current rehabilitated zone covers a surface of 9,740 km² for approximately 306,000 inhabitants with a high average density of 31.3 inhabitants/km². The cultivated surfaces cover 135,800 ha, of which 42% offer dry cultivation. Counter-season intensive agriculture for commercial purposes has progressed strongly for the last five years with 3,400 ha providing an overall production of 85,000 tons.

Since 2000, in addition to the family farms, the Office du Niger has tried to install private investors (agribusinesses) on its lands through a lease system (common lease of 30 years and long lease of 50 years). The farmers have argued that this system is a two-tier regime and they demand to have access to the leases as well. They believe they could produce more with the security given by a lease, contrary to the precarious situation they currently suffer under the exploitative licence system. (See Dougnon, Improving Institutions for Pro-Poor Growth Report, 2005).

Whereas the agribusinesses (private investors) have secure access to land, thousands of farmer families, who have been living on the ON's land for more than five decades, suffer a precarious situation.

1. The Government of Mali presented, in 1997 at the World Bank, with the assistance of the Association for the Development of the Production of Rice in West Africa or ARDAR (Association pour le Développement de la Riziculture en Afrique de l'Ouest), an exploratory study on the intensification of rice growing at the ON. The World Bank agreed to provide its technical and financial aid and other international sponsors followed the example. The first rehabilitation pilot project was undertaken by the Netherlands in 1982. Currently six donors provide assistance to the ON: the European Union, the World Bank and the French, Dutch, German and US Governments (for more details see http://www.worldbank.org/afro/findings/french/ffind61.htm).

2. For more details see http://www.maliagriculture.org/services_tech/Office%20du%20Niger/page-ON.html
However long a farmer has been living at the ON, he can be expelled for the non payment, partial or total, of the water license. The painful events of 2003–2004 illustrate the problem: 4,700 families were expelled for the non payment, partial or total, of the water license. The M’Bewani perimeter is an example of an experiment of participative development, and, in total, 5,000 hectares were confiscated from their owners. Following the intervention of the Prime Minister of Mali, those who were expelled were reinstalled on their lands in November 2004. However this conflict demonstrates how the land tenure regime is one of the main worries for farmers.

In addition to the agribusiness, Mali has been trying to develop a programme of participative development. The M’Bewani perimeter is an example of an experiment of participative development, where the farmers have taken part in the development of their land. This was also implemented in Macina and Sokolo. Regrettably these cases are already a source of conflict between the ON and the farmers. The farmers find that the cost of participation is too high considering the low production they can achieve from the land.

A study of the relationships between institutions and farmer organizations (FOs) at the Office du Niger (ON) could be fruitful for a number of reasons:

- The change of the status of the farmers at the ON from closely controlled workers to private economic operators;
- The ON, which was a closed company similar to those during the soviet period, became a company that works under the conditions of international sponsors (World Bank, USAID, International Fund for Agricultural Development, Inter-American Development Bank, French Agency for Development, etc.);
- The multiple constraints that prevent the FOs from being able to influence the legal institutions;
- The multiple conflicts between the FOs and the ON concerning the water and the land.

This table shows the institutional and organizational changes at the ON between 1985 and 2000:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adopted Reform</th>
<th>Related Institution</th>
<th>Related Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmers’ Empowerment</td>
<td>1984–86</td>
<td>Creation of 140 Village Associations or AVs (Associations Villagéises) (commercialization of paddy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of agribusiness (private investors)</td>
<td>1994–96</td>
<td>Two new systems of land tenure: the common lease and the long lease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer participation in the management of water</td>
<td>1994–</td>
<td>Decree No. 96–188/PRM of 1 July 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of the New ON and farmer participation in the management of land</td>
<td>1994–</td>
<td>Decree No. 96–188/PRM of 1 July 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of the Agro-Industry</td>
<td>2000–</td>
<td>Co-operatives of agricultural producers; Association of service providers; Association of craftsmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-inforcement of unionism at the ON</td>
<td>1997–98</td>
<td>Official recognition of the unions by the ON</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the Inventory of Land Resources, on a total surface of 124 million ha, of which 74.8 million ha is desert, Mali has 5.5 million ha of forests and 43.7 million ha usable for agriculture and breeding. The land suited to irrigation was estimated at 2,200,000 ha, of which the Office du Niger owns 960,000 ha. To redevelop all the land suited to irrigation, the Government highlighted the need of:

- Total water control (84,000 ha)
- Partial water control (recession farming)
- Rehabilitation of the slums (300,000 ha)
- Rehabilitation of the small and micro polders (9,000 ha)

The Government has stated food security and the fight against poverty as the major axes of its policy. As part of this it promised the rehabilitation of a surface of 50,000 ha over the period 2002–2007. In addition to this programme, the Office du Niger set out an ambitious development project valued at 250.8 billion CFA Francs (265 million GBP). 3

In Mali, agricultural activity occupies more than 80 % of the population, contributes to more than 40 % of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and constitutes more than 2/3 of the export earnings. The ON delivers 50 % of the national production of paddy rice. Between 2002 and 2005, several development projects were launched in Mali: the hydro-agricultural dam of Tassouna in the region of Tombouctou, the Project Middle Bani (PMB) in the region of Ségou, the redevelopment of the plains of Pondori in Djenné. The question is how to make these projects beneficial to the poor? A comparison with the ON from this point of view could be useful.

2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE OFFICE DU NIGER (ON)

During the colonial period recruitment to cultivate the areas was made, initially, by force. It was essentially done within four ethnic groups, Bamana and Minanka of Sudan (current Mali) and Sanyaka and Mande of the delta (current Burkina Faso) territory approximately 600 kilometers far from the Delta (Viguier, 1950). To this population was added an important number of farmer families which, voluntarily, decided to join the Office du Niger during the droughts of 1972 and 1984:

1. As described by Chiébane Coulibaly (1997), the economic police was a military body in charge of the repression of the ‘closers’ who ‘closely’ isolated fields closed by a cordon of dikes that make them watertight. The water level inside can thus be regulated, allowing earlier cultivation. For example, in the event of heavy rainfall, the field can be isolated by closing the sluice gates, and during low water in summer the water can be retained inside the ‘closers’.
Some historic stages of the Office du Niger

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Study conducted by the engineer Bélime on the possibility of irrigation in the central delta of Niger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Creation of the Office du Niger in charge of the study and rehabilitation of the delta. The project envisaged the irrigation and cultivation of 510,000ha of cotton and 450,000ha rice by 300,000 farmers and their families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Opening of the channel of the Sahel. Installation of the first voluntary and forced habitations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Creation of the Markala dam and abolition of the forced recruitment of labour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948/61</td>
<td>Creation of the mechanized rice centre of 5,600ha with paid employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Opening of the Macina channel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960/61</td>
<td>Independence of Mali and hand-over of the Office du Niger to the Malian State. The ON has the monopoly on commercialization, which led to the creation of the economic police to control the transfer of harvests; nearly 2,000 Moso people return to their countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Beginning of the sugar cane cultivation with the assistance of the Chinese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Abandonment of the cultivation of cotton; monoculture of rice, attribution of 1 hectare for three people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975/76</td>
<td>Voluntary return of a second wave of Mossi inhabitants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975/80</td>
<td>Development of hors-casiers14th cultivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>First studies for the rehabilitation of the casiers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978/81</td>
<td>Allocation of lands on the basis of 4ha by plough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979/82</td>
<td>Study of the requirement for water for rice and sugar cane (project BEAU Besoins en eau du riz et de la canne à sucre).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981/84</td>
<td>Study of the management of water (project GEAU Gestion de l'eau).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Beginning of the rehabilitation programme ARPON (Improvement of the Production of Rice in the Office du Niger).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Suppression of the economic police; creation of the first village associations (AVs), orientation affirmed towards intensification and rehabilitation. Creation of the sugar complex of Higher Kala (SUKALA) and its separation from the Office du Niger. Free commercialization of Paddy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Many purchases of oxen on credit FIA (ARPON). Experiment of cultivation in counter-season.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Study of the Master development plan for the Zone of the Office du Niger (Étude du Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement pour la Zone de l'Office du Niger), September 1999.

In 1994, the policy known as the Reform created the New Office du Niger (Nou ON).11 The New ON was born from the ashes of the former ON through the privatization, transfer and liquidation of its constituent entities.

The privatization involved the following organizations: the Society of Rice-growers of the Delta or SRD (Société des Riziculteurs du Delta), the Society of Development of the Delta or STD (Société des Travaux du Delta), the Workshop of Assembly of Assemblée (AGA) and Paddy or AVs (Société des Rizeries du Delta or STD), the Society of Development of the Delta or STD and the Fund for the Village Development or FDV (Fonds de développement Villagéois). Several hundreds of workers were dismissed and the total cost of redundancies (in terms of rights, compensations and bonuses) was several million CFA Francs, which were paid by the French and Dutch Co-operations, the European Union and the USAID.

Following the 1994 Reform (creation of the New Office du Niger), farmers’ participation was extended to the management of the water and the land tax through two Joint Committees, bringing together the representatives of the farmers and of the ON: the Joint Committee for the Management of the Secondary Hydraulic Network Maintenance Fund or CPGRS (Comité Paritaires de Gestion des Fonds de Rénovation pour l'Entretien du Réseau Secondaire) and the Joint Committee for Land Management or CPTG (Comité Paritaires de Gestion des Terres). These two organizations deliberate on the attribution of land and on the eviction of farmers.

The farms’ equipment is considerable: the ON zone included in June 1999, 514 threshing machines, 498 hulling machines, 149 motorized cultivators, 32 tractors and 122 mills. Today, livestock is estimated at 482,000 heads, with a strong predominance of cattle. 160,000 heads of cattle belong to the ON’s farms.

At the ON the production of rice is varied: intensive production of rice in the rehabilitated casiers and increasingly intensive production of rice on the non-rehabilitated casiers and hors-casiers. Pluvial agriculture, however, also remains important; it equals and sometimes exceeds the surfaces where rice is cultivated.

From the 1990s a diversification strategy was pursued at the ON. The ON’s management understood that with rice only, the farmer could not escape from the trap of poverty and debts.12 Intensive agriculture for commercial purposes was developed very strongly in 1997 and 1998; the main crops were: onion, sweet potato, tomatoes, garlic, gumbo and chilli. Further diversification occurred with the development of production of corn and potatoes.

A further point worth noting is that the development of irrigation in the rehabilitated zones, by creating vast zones of flood, was favourable to fish reproduction and increased the practice of fishing. Fishing is practised, besides the professionals in Bozo and Somono, by certain farmers in the zone.

8. Ton, is a bambara word meaning organization. The village Ton is a form of pre-colonial villages organization based on the common lands and voluntary associations, any participation, any contribution, any finance institutions in the ON.
9. As part of the 1985 participative policy, the Malian Government tried and revitalised the Village Tons by giving them a legal basis, as opposed to the Village Associations which never got one.
10. Out of the ‘casiers’. 11. The ‘New Office du Niger’ means simply the ‘privatisation’ of some of its economic activities, in which farmers and outside interests can now compete. From being a state-owned enterprise, in the mid-1990s it became an administrative structure for land and water allocation, to which the private sector, in which the private sector can operate alongside family farms in the production and commercialization of rice. It is noteworthy to mention that after the redefinition of the ON missions, international donors supported the reinforcement of FOs (Farmer Organizations, notably Farmers’ Unions) and the development of financial institutions in the ON.
of fishermen is estimated at 7,500 individuals, to whom we should add seasonal fishermen who are not from the zone.

In sum, the ON has experienced three big institutional reforms in 20 years: farmer empowerment through the AVs, the Reform, which redefined the roles of the ON and of the FOs, and the introduction of participative development and agribusiness (private investors). Whatever these reforms have brought, so far, saved the farmers from poverty nor have they allowed the ON to maximise its potential. Where do the conflicts lie? Is it the in-land regime or in the farmer organizations?

3. OBJECTIVES AND BASIC QUESTIONS

We undertook prospective studies (in October and December 2005) to examine how some Malian economic institutions (Office du Niger, Mali Company for the Development of Textiles or CMTD Compagnie Malienne pour le Developpement des Textiles) could, in the years to come, contribute to a pro-poor economic growth. This exploratory research focused on the Office du Niger, which remains the state company where reforms raise most controversies because of socio-economic consequences. Indeed, the Malian Government introduced agribusiness into an environment where the farmers didn’t have full understanding of the rules. The FOs were not capable of benefiting from the opportunities offered by the institutional reforms. Facing competition from the big private investors, the farmers were worried about their own economic and social survival at the ON:

- At what price will the farmers have access to the irrigated lands?
- In the context of the agribusiness, how will the old and the new irrigated lands be beneficial to the poor farmers?
- How can the family farms be improved in surface and productivity?

Several studies carried out in western Africa show the importance of family farms in the reduction of rural and urban poverty. According to Michael Lipton, three conditions must be met to improve the productivity of family farms:

- National political and economic incentives and institutions to create and apply appropriate crop science,
- Enough land in the hands of the efficient farming poor,
- Opening and widening markets (Lipton, 2004:2).

Toulmin and Gueye think that the distinction made between the family farms and agribusiness (private investors) has no basis. ‘The first is often presented as backward, inefficient and subsistence-oriented while the second is attributed the virtues of being modern and forward-looking, efficient and market-oriented’ (Toulmin and Gueye, on 2003:31–32).

However, having supported for more than 50 years the family farms at the ON with no long-term success, the Malian Government has now granted advantages to agribusiness (private investors), which has a commercial and industrial orientation. Essentially the Government massively distributes lands to investors, but they lack adequate resources to develop the lands.

We will try in the following pages to answer basic questions such as: how do the farmer organizations support the interests of the farmers in the new institutional architecture of the Office du Niger? How do the farmers explain their decisions to reject or to conform to the legal institutions? How do the farmer organizations play their increased role in the definition and execution of the policies in the ON?

We will begin this section with a brief description of the contents of the Contract Plan. However, in this section we will focus our analysis on the second legal institution (the Decree of Management), which determines the security of the farmers’ income. It is also the institution of which farmer unions deeply demand revision. We consider that its revision is crucial to fight against poverty in the ON.

5. LEGAL INSTITUTIONS

Two statutory texts clarify and regulate the relationship between the Office du Niger, the farmers and the State, regarding the management of irrigated lands and their development:


b) The Decree of Management of 1 July 1996 (decreé n°96–188/P-RM), about land management, completed by the decree n°96–695/MDRE-SP of 30 October 1996 with specifications.

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5.1 Contract Plan

The Contract Plan13 determines the consensual framework of partnership between the State, the ON and the farmers for the implementation of a development policy for agricultural production in the ON. The

13. For the moment the ON just meets the last condition which constitutes a threat for the second one. As for the first condition, the reform on agriculture (monopolised financially and materially by the only Institute of Rural Economy - IER) is in a precarious situation given the budgetary reductions.

14. As we will see later in the section of constraints, at the ON we observe the opposite tendency: a too high cost of immigrant labour in the market and the erosion of the discipline of work at the level of the family members.

15. Note from the translator: the term ‘complementarity’ (complémentarité) refers to the inter-relations of reciprocity whereby one thing supplements or depends on the other.
Contract Plan determines, for each partner, the technical, financial and institutional commitments as well as the principles and mechanisms to achieve the Government's objectives. An evaluation of each Contract Plan provides judgements on the results of economic production and helps determine whether the institutional reforms, intended to reinforce the relationship between the State, the ON and the farmers, were really implemented.

5.2 Decree of Management

The Decree of Management is the 'engine' of the Contract Plan. Both statutory texts have a relationship which recalls the relation between the Rulebook and the Internal Regulations of an organization. The Decree of Management contains 4 chapters. The first chapter tackles the general clauses about land allocation in the ON by the Government (Study of the Master development plan for the Zone of the Office du Niger or Schéma Directeur, 1999).

5.2.1 Management of water and maintenance of the hydraulic network

The second chapter of the Decree of Management is about the management of the hydraulic network, which is divided into 3 categories: primary, secondary and tertiary networks. The Office du Niger manages, on behalf of the State, the dam at Markala and its annexe networks (channel of navigation, lock of the Thio), the feeder channel and primary channels (the channel of Sahel and the falla of artificial pond) of Molodo, the channel of Macina and the falla of Boky worè, the regulating works of points A, B and C, the section of the principal drains located out of the limits of the rehabilitated areas. The ON itself manages, on its own account the secondary network. It assumes the financial responsibility for the maintenance of the secondary network and for the collection of taxes on farmer production.

The farmers, under the supervision of the Office du Niger, are in charge of the maintenance and management of the tertiary hydraulic networks. In the event of non-maintenance, the ON carries out the maintenance in place of the farmers, but the farmers must still pay for the maintenance work undertaken by the ON. The tertiary hydraulic networks include:

- the sprinklers and the related irrigating system,
- the sub-sprinklers and the related irrigating system,
- the drains of sprinklers and sub-sprinklers,
- the dykes,
- the field and lot tracks.

Chapter four of the Decree of Management is about the Joint Committees: CPGF (Joint Committee for Land Management) and GPGFERS (Joint Committee for the Management of the Secondary Hydraulic Network Maintenance Fund). The institutionalization of the joint committees intended to answer two concerns expressed in the letter of Development Policy of the National Rice Production Policy: land security for the farmers (Joint Committee for Land Management) and participation of the farmers in the management of the rehabilitation works (Joint Committee of Management of the Secondary Hydraulic Network Maintenance Fund).

5.2.2 Water license

According to the ON managers, 'the best guarantee of security for the farmers is the payment of the water license'. Indeed, the non-payment of the license is the most frequent reason for contract cancellation.

The water license rate is fixed annually by the decree of the Ministry in charge of the farmers involved in the following land tenure regimes: Annual Farming Contract or CAE (Contrat Annuel d'Exploitation), Farming License or PEA (Permis d'Exploitation Agricole) and the Temporary Farming License (temporary PEA). The rate is informed by the ON services. Every year the ON collates information and prepares a file to determine the level of water license on the basis of the following elements:

- The hydraulic management charges of all the primary and secondary networks,
- the cost of the ongoing and periodic maintenance of the secondary network,
- the provisions for potential major repairs of the secondary network,
- the fair share of the structure expenses corresponding to these activities,
- the provisions for the collective defence of cultivated land.

The water license rate also takes into account the different types of lands: developed lands, newly developed lands, rehabilitated lands and non-rehabilitated lands.

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In the event of non-maintenance, the ON carries out the maintenance in place of the farmers, but the farmers must still pay for the maintenance work undertaken by the ON. The tertiary hydraulic networks include:

- the sprinklers and the related irrigating system,
- the sub-sprinklers and the related irrigating system,
- the drains of sprinklers and sub-sprinklers,
- the dykes,
- the field and lot tracks.

The ON prepares a file regarding the determination of the license rate which is then checked by the ON services. Every year the ON collates information and prepares a file to determine the level of water license on the basis of the following elements:

- The hydraulic management charges of all the primary and secondary networks,
- the cost of the ongoing and periodic maintenance of the secondary network,
- the provisions for potential major repairs of the secondary network,
- the fair share of the structure expenses corresponding to these activities,
sub-letting or transfer of parcels, systematic non compliance with the other contractual commitments and with the measures of the Decree of Management and Specifications.

One of the objectives of the IPPG report is to answer the following question: to what extent and under what conditions can formal institutional change bring a sustained decline in poverty? At the ON, farmer participation in certain legal institutions can be considered an institutional change intended to drive improvement of the farmers’ living conditions. It is important to note that since 1994, the farmers participate (to a greater or lesser extent) in the Joint committees and in the Rural council.

6. FARMER REPRESENTATION IN THE LEGAL INSTITUTIONS

One of the institutional innovations of the 1994 Reform is the active participation of the farmers (via their General Deputy) in the debates and in the preparation of the Contract Plan, which establishes the relation between the ON, the farmers and the State concerning the management of irrigated lands (see section 1) and in the Decree of Management. The farmer participation in these activities allowed for the revision of the Joint Committees and of the respective roles of the different parties (ON, State, FOs) and of the Rural Council. In accordance with the policy of decentralization, the ON adopted a principle of revision of the Decree of Management according to evolution by the Joint Committees. But what are the responsibilities of the two Joint Committees and of the other legal institutions (Rural Council, Municipalities and General Deputy)?

6.1. Joint Committee for the management of land

The necessity of revitalizing the various entities of the ON, of improving the farmers’ participation and of introducing more transparency in the centralized management of the licensing funds led, from 1990 onwards, to the creation of the Joint Committees.

Articles 5 and 7 of the specifications promulgated in 1996 stipulate that a Joint Committee for Land Management (CPGT) must be established in each zone of the ON. This Joint Committee is in charge of:

- Receiving and examining the allocation or reallocation of lands with agricultural or building purposes,
- Examining eviction proposals for farmers failing to fulfil their responsibilities;
- Examining the farmers’ complaints about the Office du Niger and its services;
- The CPGT of the zone also serves as mediator in the disputes between the ON and the farmers.

The CPGT in each zone is in charge of the following issues:

- Allocation of land for new installations, except for the long and the common leases;
- Adjustment of farmer’s quantity of land;
- Keeping the farmers’ register up-to-date when someone dies.
- Division of farms previously belonging to the same family.

6.2. Joint Committee for the management of the network maintenance fund

The Decree of Management stipulates the establishment of a Joint Committee for the Management of the Secondary Hydraulic Network Maintenance Fund (CPGFERS) at a zone level. The CPGFERS is in charge of:

- Approval of the annual budget for network maintenance;
- Elaboration, adoption and execution of the maintenance programme of development (including the market share allocation to private companies);
- Control of the use of funds and the acceptance of works;
- Improvement of the collection of license payments, particularly by greater sensitization of the farmers;
- Examination of farmer applications for tax reductions.

The CPGFERS is also used as a mediating authority in the case of any disagreements between the farmers and the Office du Niger regarding licenses and the maintenance of the networks.

The Joint Committees are composed of an equal number of farmers, ON representatives and development partners. These Committees consist of:

On the ON zone side:

- The ON’s director, who chairs the Committee
- the Head of the Department of Water Management or SGE (Service de gestion de l’eau)
- the Head of the Administrative and Financial Service or SAF (Service Administratif et Financier)
- the Head of the Rural Council Department,
- the personnel in charge of the projects financed by external sponsors.

On the farmers’ side:

- A farmer representative is elected for each family farm and for each casier.

6.3. Rural Council

The role of the Rural Council is as follows:

- Diffusion of technical topics (via network of contacts in the villages)
- Credit management support (assessment of the AVs (Village Associations) and TVs (Village Tons)
- Liaison with research and development initiatives (in collaboration with the Institute of Rural Economy)
- Land management (installation, eviction, regrouping)

The ON has liberalized these activities: if a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) wants to be responsible for them, it can do so with the agreement of the ON. Some representatives affirm that NGOs intervene only in those villages that are well organised by the ON, that is in the pilot villages.

6.4. Farmer Deputy General

The Farmer Deputy General represents the farmers at the ON Board of Directors. On behalf of the farmers he signs the Contract Plan. However, all the farmers say that once elected, he becomes a man of the ON. They characterize his power thus: ‘the power of the General Deputy is the ability to speak out, otherwise, he cannot solve anything in the farmers interest.’

6.5. Municipalities

The creation and recent full establishment of local authorities, and in particular rural municipalities, constitute a major change in the institutional landscape. Article 3 of the Decree N0 96 of the Ministry for Rural development and the Environment stipulates that within the framework of decentralization, the ON will be able to entrust by convention some functions of land management to the rural Municipalities. The rural municipalities could notably be entrusted with functions of:

- Definition of the spaces to be allocated to collective or specific needs such as breeding spaces
- Land allocation for housing
- Land allocation for traditional cultivation in the hors-casiers zones (See, Law N0 96 MDRE-SG including specifications, 1996)

A coordination between the ON and each municipality stipulates in detail the conditions and modalities of delegation of management activities. It is clear that the text does not entrust ownership of the land to the municipalities – only management of the land.

6.6. Creation of legal institutions and the farmer’s involvement

The Reform was the most spectacular restructuring of the ON since its creation in 1932. Since implementation, farmers have been worried about two key institutions of the Office du Niger: one related to land security and the other related to the water license; in other words, the Decree of Management and the Contract Plan. The farmers were not involved in the preparation of the Reform legal texts. They were simply given an explanation of the contents of the various regulatory texts during a meeting, held in Niono on 25 October 1994. The minutes of the meeting show that M. Djibril Aw, General Deputy of the Government for the ON Reform, explained to the farmers the contents of the agricultural policy letter and of the law 1994-004 reforming the ON (See the ‘Minutes of the Consultation Meeting with the ON Development Stakeholder, 25–28 October 1994’).

Our discussions with the farmers made clear that these laws came from the top. Apart from some of the leaders, most individual farmers do not clearly understand how the ON formal institutions work. This situation exacerbates the conflicts between the ON and the farmers. Some of the key questions that need to be addressed are:

- What is the level of understanding that the farmers have of the management of the water license?
- How is it that half of the license funds are allocated to the ON administration and the other half to the maintenance of the secondary network, do the farmers understand the objective of this allocation?
- Are the farmers involved in the management of the funded allocation to the maintenance of the secondary network? How do the Joint Committees work? Is it possible for the farmers to control the
management of the funds allocated to the maintenance of the secondary network?

- How do the three stakeholders (ON, Joint Committees and individual farmers) organize their engagement?

We will describe the farmers’ responses to these questions in the section about constraints in the transfer of activities. But before that, let’s have a look at the FOs history. How have they been created? Was their role clearly defined? How were they affected by the inheritance of previously centrally managed tasks? What kind of social and cultural forces have determined their character and their action? What kind of relationship do they have with the legal institutions?

6.7. Organigram of the Office du Niger after the 1994 Reform

Direction Générale

- Agent Comptable
- Conseiller Juridique
- Service administratif
- Service comptable
- Audit/Contrôle de gestion
- Direction de L'Aménagement et du Développement Rural
  - S.C.R./ Vull.
  - S.E.R.P.
  - S.A.H. expl. Maint
  - Cadastre
  - F & D
  - Aménagiste
  - Agro-irriguant
- Direction Administrative et Financière
- Service Conseil Rural
- Service Gestion de l'eau
- P.O.P

Légendes
- SCR  Service Conseil Rural
- S.E  Suivi-Evaluation
- F & D Promotion des Organisations Paysannes
- AGRO-IRRIGANT
- S.A.H. Service des Aménagements Hydrauliques
- C.T.M. Cellule Travaux et Marché
- S.E.R.P. Service d'Exploitation du Réseau Primaire
- S.G.E. Service Gestion Eau
- S.A. Service Administratif
- S.C. Service Comptable

7. Farmer Organizations (FOS)

Since their creation in 1932, the Farmer Organizations tried to organize the farmers in co-operative associations (see 'The dynamics of the farmers’ empowerment in the ON' - La dynamique de la responsabilisation paysanne à l'ON, 1987). We examined the following FOS:21

7.1 Autochtone Agricultural Association (AAI)

Created by decree on 26 July 1931 by the General Governor in Dakar, the Autochtone Agricultural Association or AAI (Association Agricole Indigène) was an organization which each farmer and family was obliged to join. The objective was to improve living conditions and production methods and to provide some equipment to its members. Subsequently, in 1942, the Federation of AAI of the Irrigated Lands in the Valley of Niger (FAAITIVN) was also created.

7.2 Agricultural Co-operative Association (ACA) from 1958 to 1963

The Agricultural Co-operative Association or ACA (Association Coopérative Agricole) give support to the AAI that have failed. The ACAs have a role in the following economic functions:
- agricultural techniques,
- harvests and mechanical threshing,
- collection, conditioning and commercialization,
- selection of seeds,
- use of transport equipment,
- use of the cattle jointly owned,
- credit and savings action,
- provisioning or supply action.

7.3. Co-operative Units (UC) from 1963 to 1984

The Co-operative Units or UC (Unités Coopératives) were created in application of the law number 63-21 AN-RM of 25 January 1963, under the general statute of Co-operation in the Republic of Mali. There were 35 UCs for 35 Production units in the ON.

The UCs had the same functions as the ACAs. In 1979, the funds of the UC federation were transferred to an account in the Mali Bank for Development (BDM) in Niono. It was the beginning of the self-management by the farmers’ general deputies. Following a recommendation by the ON Board of Directors in October 1986, the UCs assets were transferred to the Village Associations. We believe that these FOS failed because of the tight control exerted by the ON.

7.4. Village Associations (AVs) and the farmers’ empowerment

During its constituting Congress of March 1979, the Democratic Union of the People of Mali or UDPM (Union Démocratique du Peuple Malien), a single dictatorial party, based its policy of co-operation in rural environment on the AVs (Village Associations) and the TVs (Village Tons) in order to induce endogenous, participative and integrated development. On 27 February 1982, the Government published decree number 53 on the statute of the Village Tons (see The Dynamics of the Farmers Empowerment in the ON – La dynamique de la responsabilisation paysanne à l'ON, 1987). The AV was presented as a pre-co-operative transitory organization that will become a TV. At the ON, the Government created 140 AVs in two years: 66 AVs in 1984 and 74 in 1985. This acceleration followed the farmers’ complaints about the economic police’s exactions and the abusive behaviour of certain supervisors.

21. Besides these, there are other social and professional farmer associations such as the Chamber of Agriculture and the permanent Assembly of Chambers of Agriculture, all of which operate in the ON. The law N93-044 which created the regional Chambers of Agriculture and the permanent Assembly of the Chambers of Agriculture, defines them as Public Establishments with professional character, endowed with legal personality and financial autonomy. The regional Chamber of Agriculture have jurisdiction in the administrative regions of the country. The Permanent Assembly of the regional Chambers of Agriculture of Mali was created at a national level. The regional Chambers of Agriculture and the Permanent Assembly of regional Chambers of Agriculture are consultative professional organizations of agricultural interest. They are interlocutors of the Public Authorities in all aspects regarding:
- policies of price, income, credit and commercialization of farm products;
- legislation relative to the agricultural, breeding, forest, fish, fiscal and customs activities;
- legislation relative to the labour law of the agricultural, breeding, forest activities as well as those activities relating to the land license tax in rural areas;
- agricultural training;
- means to develop agricultural activity.
7.5. Training and transfer of activities to the farmers

According to the International Elimination of Illiteracy Report (September 1986), in order to transfer some activities from the ON to the farmer organizations, a significant number of farmers received special training, resulting in:

- 405 threshing-machines drivers,
- 112 primary harvest agents,
- 90 seed managers,
- 280 managers of the sack trade,
- 132 treasurers of the AVs/TVs,
- 15 agents for the soap manufacture,
- 19 agents of veterinary pharmacies,
- 256 agents of village health.

The transferred activities are:

- Mechanical threshing. It is the economic base of the farmer organizations thanks to the small threshing-machines or the large threshing-machines, commonly called the ‘potex’ of the Farmers empowerment,
- Sack management,
- Seed management,
- Primary harvesting (thanks to the acquisition of the weighing machines),
- Combating desertification,
- Improving shelters.

7.6. Unions: SEXAGON and SYNADEC

Two farmer unions exist in the ON. The Union of Farmers of the ON or SEXAGON (Syndicat des Exploitants Agricoles de l’ON) was created in 1997 and remained the sole Union for just one year until the Union of Farmers, Breeders and Cereal Producers or SYNADEC (Syndicat des Agriculteurs, Eleveurs et Céréaliers) was created in 1998 following a split from SEXAGON. In addition to the Farmers of the ON, the SYNADEC has members of other professions outside the ON irrigated zone.

The unions’ objective is to defend the interests of the family farms, in particular regarding the land. Union existence is more legitimate than ever but they recognise that farmers must prove that they can make progress in technical and economical fields without the help of the agribusiness. SEXAGON therefore created a programme based on three points:

- strengthening the unions in the ON;
- creating commercialisation co-operatives;
- implementing a research centre of technical innovation and farming expertise.

7.7. Institutional reforms and the Farmer Organization’s boom at the Office du Niger

At the end of the 1980s, the improvement of agricultural production and rural promotion were the priority activities for the ON, around which it organised and accelerated the process of transfer of activities to the farmer organizations (See Mission of Support to the Reform of the ON – Mission d’Appui à la Réorganisation de l’ON, GERSAR, July 1988).

After their creation, under the impetus of the ARPON programme (Improvement of the Production of Rice in the Office du Niger), the AVs received training in organization and management which empowered them to take over several economic activities previously carried out by the Office du Niger: mechanical threshing, commercialisation, agricultural credit, provisioning of production material. In addition to these activities, the AVs undertake social activities (health, elimination of illiteracy) and carry out, for the benefit of their members, several collective investments (schools, stores, threshing-machines, hulling-machines). However, this economic performance did not last, as we mentioned above.

Despite the training of the farmers in key fields, the institutional reforms did not create a solid base for a true policy of empowerment of the farmers. It was within this chaotic organizational situation that the State pulled out during the Reform. The proliferation of AVs and the creation of the Groupings of Economic Interest or GIEs22 (Groupements d’Intérêt Économique) at the beginning of 1991 resulted in the creation of a large number of farmer organizations and micro-finance institutions across the entire zone of the Office du Niger.

Today, there are four types of farmer organizations in the ON:

- AVs (Village associations) and TVs (Village Tons), 156 in 2002;
- GIE (Groupings of economic interest), 456 in 2002;
- Co-operatives, 17 in 2006;
- 2 Trade unions (SEXAGON and SYNADEC).

After only three years of operation (1987–1990), the Village Associations sank into a major crisis marked by strong social tensions. Bad management of income and credit and the fact that the internal rules were not respected (assessments, members renewal, accounts control) were the principal causes.23 This situation prompted the creation of parallel organizations – the GIEs. In 1997 there were more than 450 GIEs in the ON region: 246 Groupings of Economic Interest for Men or GIEM (Groupements d’Intérêt Économique Hommes), 210 Groupings of Economic Interest for Women or GIEF (Groupements d’Intérêt Économique Femmes) and 91 credit and savings institutions (Caisses) (See, Study of the Master development plan for the Zone of the Office du Niger – Etude Schéma Directeur, 2004). It is important to note that a farmer cannot be member of both an AV and a GIE. Despite their poor operation, the AVs continue to exist along with the GIEs, mainly because each village is supposed to have an AV. The AVs still manage the village social amenities (school, health centre, etc.)

Why did the FOs fail so quickly into a financial crisis? What are the economic and social constraints that held back the transfer of activities?

8. Constraints related to the transfer of activities to the Farmer Organizations

The following table illustrates the different types of constraints the ON farmers are facing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal Constraints</th>
<th>Economic Constraints</th>
<th>Social Constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence of a legal framework</td>
<td>Over-indebtedness and proliferation of the AVs</td>
<td>Social cohesion crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited power for the farmer members of the joint committees</td>
<td>Corruption and bad management</td>
<td>Erosion of the work ethic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialization difficulties</td>
<td>Difficulties of access to fertilizer</td>
<td>Under-equipment and shortage of land parcels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Too expensive man-power</td>
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From 1990 onwards a number of constraints – legal, economic and social – gradually prevented the farmer organizations from exploiting their potential. The economic constraints are the most damaging to rice productivity. However, legal constraints are at the root of the problem. Therefore we will start our analysis with the legal constraints.

8.1 Legal Constraints

The main legal constraints are the absence of legal framework for the AVs and the limited power of the farmer delegates in the joint committees.

8.1.1 Absence of a legal framework

M. Guirou of the village Bagadaji explains how, because of the lack of legal framework, the AVs were a source of enrichment for a few farmer leaders. In 1992–93, the Jokoromins tradersmen stole more than 200 million CFA Francs (£211,500 GBP) from the farmers. Here is what he says in substance:

"The Village Associations did not have any legal frame. The managers diverted the money and there is no legal way to sue them. Thus, a manager, after having diverted the money of a Village Association, resigned and, quietly, created a Grouping of Economic Interest to get credit from another financial institution."

Regarding the depletion of the Village Associations funds, M. Ongoïba from Dogofry agrees with M. Guirou when he says:

"The Village Associations were created without laws. All the villages were organised in Village Associations without preparation. The leaders of Village Associations were influential, without morals. They were former chiefs of the co-operatives of the old Office du Niger. They were used to diverting the money of the Village Association, when he says:

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22. The Groupings of Economic Interest (GIEs) are ruled by the trade code. Besides rice, the GIEs are also organized around specific activities (intensive agriculture for commercialization, breeding forestry) and are formed by men or women.

23. Solidarity groups and women’s groups appeared following the BNDA (National Bank for Agricultural Development) decision to suspend the loans to the AVs. In many villages, solidarity groups were created around the credit issue. The activities of those groupings were diverse: intensive agriculture for commercialization, nut production, ovine production improvement, small trade and elimination of illiteracy.
gave 20 million dollars to the Village Associations. From there, certain farm managers understood that this was interesting business. They tried to get rid of the first persons in charge. They didn’t manage it. Thus was born a conflict of interest. The BNDA (National Agricultural Development Bank) worsened the conflicts by creating the Groupings of Economic Interest. It failed to explain to the farmers that the money it lent needed to be paid back. Within the same family, different members can belong to different groupings. The core problem of all these farmer organizations is that they are managed by a sole person who is not accountable to anybody. The farmers have been victims of the new private organizations.

Additionally, the focus of the AVs and criteria which they should adhere to were never specified. This deficiency led to possible conflicts between the ON and the farmers (especially between the suppliers, credit organizations (administration, party and traditional organization) and limits the AVs’ power over the ON concerning the farmers’ duties, land attribution, eviction and credit deposit for the non-residents24 and newly installed people. According to the chief of the village Yangassadiou Kana, before the creation of the Joint Committees, the chiefs of the AVs were invited to the ON to dialogue, but since the Committees appeared, no chief of an AV is consulted on any matter anymore. He thinks that the reason is that the egoistic chiefs of the AVs divert the farmers’ money with the complicity of the ON.

8.1.2 Limited powers of the farmer members of the Joint Committees

According to the farmers, before the creation of the Joint Committees, they were not involved in the management of the funds from the water license and did not even know what they were paying the license for.

The creation of the Joint Committees marks a considerable improvement in the farmers’ participation, in their direct involvement in the management of the stocks bought with the license money they paid, and in the transparency in the management of these resources.

The programmes of maintenance are initiated by the villages and implemented by the Joint Committees. The Committees determine the priorities according to the money available, determine the programme of maintenance and engage in consultation with the workers and entrepreneurs. Control and reception of works are the Joint Committees’ responsibility. A follow-up of the budget’s implementation is made at each meeting. The money is then paid to the suppliers of the cheques, the farmers are deeply involved in the management and in the control of the license funds.

In the village of Bagadadji, the farmers assert that the real problem of the farmers’ representation in the institutions of the ON lies in the choice of the representatives. Unfortunately, people vote according to the family ties and not according to the skills and the seriousness of the candidates. It is also believed that the deputies are corrupted by the ON and cease to speak out. For example, the sprinklers of the non-resident are never well maintained. The Joint Committees keep quiet because they are often the ‘friends’ of the ON Management team. According to Yaya Diarra, in charge of the Rural Council, what the farmers call ‘corruption’ relates to 1,000,000 CFA Francs (£5.30 GBP) per day paid to the farmer deputies for the duration of the ON work meetings.

Many think that it is indeed the payment of the compensatory allowance (5,000 CFA Francs per day), as a contribution to the travelling expenses of the farmer members at the end of each meeting, which makes them the deputies. This moderate sum created a tendency, in some of them to behave like privileged people (farmer-civil servants), thus deviating from their mission of information link for the farmers and from their role of counter-balancing the administration.

According to a farmer from Diabali, the farmer deputies are quickly convinced by the ON managers who have power of initiation and who also expect that the ON managers will return the favour by providing them better access to the land. ‘When the farmer deputies sit at the Joint Committees, their first concern is how to increase their own land’ he said. According to him, the farmers must elect wealthy farmers, difficult to corrupt. Because of these social problems, the Joint Committees experience serious delays in the collection of license payments, which damage the relationship between the farmer members and the organizations and the Office du Niger. For the farmers, the fact that the Joint Committee takes delivery of defective or badly made material is a proof of its inefficiency or its corrupted character.

What about the farmers’ involvement and the possibility for the Joint Committees to control 50% of the license payments to maintain the secondary network?

Because they are generally illiterate, the farmer deputies in the two Joint Committees have almost no influence and their representation is weak. They are unaware of the credit they were allocated was the ‘money of the dead’; they had heard that some rich Europeans had died and had bequeathed a man’. Other interviewees explain that the ON farmers got too much assistance and now think that they should get everything they want. Thus was born a conflict of interest. The BNDA (National Bank for Agricultural Development) worsened this by creating the ‘threashing-machines’25 and once the AVs lost these machines, they were unable to offer services to the farmers; this is a source of their financial problems. According to certain managers, before 1991, each AV had an account at the National Bank of Agricultural Development. But following the emergence of democracy, the chiefs of the AVs emptied their accounts to avoid control.

According to M. Traoré, the farmers think that it is acceptable to take on debts and not to pay them back. They are used to seeing the State cancelling or freezing the debts. This is why they don’t care about their ‘debts’ related to agricultural development as the ON explains:

‘The ON’s farmer’s relation to debt is rather odd. He does not invest all these debts in the fields. For example if he takes 50,000 CFA Francs (£53 GBP) he would have to invest 35,000 CFA Francs (£37 GBP) in the fields to be able to pay it back. Very often he does not do it. Here is the destroying effect of the debt. The problem is that if someone does not pay back one year and nothing happens to him, all the others will refuse to pay the next time. The AV is created to give and recover the debts. If it cannot provide this function it should disappear. Our AV was a pilot. The private thrashing-machines didn’t go to Fobougou. But these two last years the AV found fertilizer only two months after the transplanting which is too late to ensure a good productivity. It is because of the non-payment of the debt that fertilizer does not arrive on time. The farmers join the AV for the fertilizer. If the AV does not provide them with fertilizer, the farmers leave it.’

M. Guirou, a wealthy farmer said that he gave 2 million CFA Francs (£2,115 GBP) in credit to his co-villagers. When he asked them to pay back, they pretended not to remember the deal. Some claimed to have already paid. According to him, such behaviour breaks solidarity between the wealthy and the poor farmers.

The bad management of the income generated by the thrashing-machines was the primary cause of failure of the AVs which then led to multiplication of the GIEs and thus the dispersion of the collective efforts into individual efforts, leading to deeper inequality between a small minority of rich farmers and a large majority of poor ones. All the AVs have huge debts. The AVs sometimes pay the Bank back but the farmers don’t pay their debts back to the AVs. According to M. Fatogomon Dembélé, controller of his village’s AV, this debt prevents the realisation of infrastructure developments (schools, dispensaries and other projects) for the benefit of the farmers. The ON had two reasons for the increase in debt: the farmers didn’t invest in production but also because of their unwillingness to pay. Some farmers simply refuse to pay their debts. The AV excludes them, they then create their Groupings. According to some managers in the village of Nonoubougou, the intervention of the Government is necessary to discipline the bad debtors. It is the only solution to reduce the disorders of the ON.

Micro-finance institutions use bailiffs to get their money back. It would also be necessary for the micro-finance institutions to organise the migrating debtors who go from one credit and savings bank to another (for example, some people disqualified by the ON go to the BMS, Malian Bank of Solidarity). This would allow the interest rates charged in the ON to be reduced and by the Banks and a delay to the reimbursement deadline. During the official visits (of the President of

24. The non-residents are the farmers who own land in a village and live in another. They can be members of the village where they have their land. Among them, many are living in the cities and use the local workforce. This workforce does not take care of the network as their employer is not around.

25. The threshing machines known as ‘Votex for the farmers’ empowerment’ were given by the ARPON project to the AVs to allow them to produce and stock their members’ rice. Unfortunately, bad management of the funds generated by these threshing machines accelerated their disappearance. They were replaced by the machines of the private investors and by losing their machines, the AVs lost their main source of income.

26. Some people we interviewed think that the real cause of the AVs’ and GIEs’ failure is non-payment of the debts. According to them, the AVs used to pay the farmers’ debts; the farmers were not obliged to do so. Some of our interviewees think that the non-payment is related to a problem of ethics – the deported populations do not have the same values about credit and its repayment. Some farmers believe that to pay the debt back is a sign of courage, it means ‘being a man’. Some farmers have not done enough agriculture; they think that they should get everything they want. Some agents accuse the State of not having explained the idea of ‘credit’ to the farmers properly. Many farmers believed that the credits were also loans and the ‘money of the dead’; they had heard that some rich Europeans had died and had bequeathed their money to the poor of Africa. They were told that this was the inheritance that was shared with them. As a consequence, the BNDA (National Bank for Agricultural Development) was short of 2 billion FCFA in unpaid debts in 1995. The management of the AVs had therefore another problem: if in a village some farmers did not repay their debt, the whole village must contribute to its recovery; the debt is not individual, but collective. Since many farmers did not understand the moral guarantees, they refused to pay back for others, the consequence was that the AVs asked for further credit. The habit of freezing credit also contributed to reinforce the culture of non-payment: an agent explained that they can contract a debt and not pay it, because whatever they do the State will eventually freeze it.
the Permanent Assembly of the Agriculture Chambers of Mali or APCAM (Assemblé Permanente des Chambres d’Agriculture du Mali), and the chairman of the ON or of the Minister for Agriculture), SEXAGON made these two requests. The officials answered ‘we will inform the appropriate authority’, and nothing ever happened.

8.2.2 Corruption and bad management

The ON transferred some of its competences to the badly organized FOs. Several farmers underline the fact that the Government did not recognize the destructive effect of corruption and misadministration of the FOs and the AVs. The permanent members were the choice of the ON. Nevertheless, the Government invited some European farmers who proposed that the ON farmers create a Co-operative of Rice Farmers. The ON transferred some of its competences to the badly organized FOs. Several farmers underline the fact that the Government did not recognize the destructive effect of corruption and misadministration of the FOs and the AVs.

According to the managers of the Grouping of Economic Interest Danaya N01, the AV of their village (Médina) was doing well before 1992. The catastrophe arrived during the 1992–93 campaign. The traders, known as Jokoramin (ethnic group of traders from Mali) took the rice to Bamako, saying that they would make payment after the sale. The village of Médina gave 15,000 tons of rice to these traders representing a sum of 45 millions CFA Francs (£48,000 GBP). The traders never came back. Overwhelmed by its debt, the AV collapsed, and so did the families. In the village of Médina the number of families has increased by 75%. According to these families, almost all the AVs of the ON have been swindled by the traders.

8.2.3 Difficulties in trading the rice

According to Lasina Lamine Traoré, chief of the Rural Council of the Kouroumari zone, argues that the fertilizer price reached a record high of 15,000–20,000 CFA Francs (£16–£21 GBP/bag), for the urea and the phosphate respectively.

8.2.5 Under-equipping and land shortage

The Government invited some European farmers who proposed that the ON farmers create a Co-operative, directed by a Board of directors of which one third is renewed each year. Nevertheless, the Government invited some European farmers who proposed that the ON farmers create a Co-operative, directed by a Board of directors of which one third is renewed each year. The intervention of more and more intermediaries also disorients the farmers. ‘All the young people are now traders’, say the old farmers.

Contrary to the poor and disorganized farmers, the traders are organized and wealthier. The farmers sell their rice at a price under the production cost. The traders are aware that the farmers do not have access to necessary information, especially to the financial information. The Government invited some European farmers who proposed that the ON farmers create a Co-operative, directed by a Board of directors of which one third is renewed each year. The farmers need to sell their rice on the market at the same time. The intervention of more and more intermediaries also disorients the farmers. ‘All the young people are now traders’, say the old farmers.

In addition to commercial activity, they also help the farmers improve the quality and quantity of their production.

8.3.1 Social cohesion crisis

There are two main types of social constraints: the social cohesion crisis in the ON villages and erosion of the work ethic.

Farmers consider that the real problem which blocks rural co-operation for pro-poor growth is the crisis of social cohesion. Villages made up of several ethnic groups are dislocated because not all of these ethnic groups are content to share the same land. A parcel of land which sustained four people ten years ago, must sustain 20 people today.

Farmers incur debt for basics such as firewood and the bricks for building. They behave as employees in big cities. ‘We have allowed farmers to think they know more than the managers’, said Mister Ongolba. According to him, there is an important stock of technological tools which is not used by the farmers. This leads to a negative impact on productivity which has decreased from 6 tons/ha to 4 tons/ha. And to fight against poverty at least 4,800 tons/ha is necessary. Most farmers do not exceed 3,750–4,800 tons/ha (50 to 65 bags/ha).

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groups have representation within the FOs (Dougnon, 2007). Ethnic tensions have been accentuated since the transfer of responsibilities from the ON to the FOs. Very often a group monopolizes both power and land, which pushes the other groups to leave the AV and create their own Grouping of Economic Interest. In many villages, the rich farmers have essentially replaced the AVs. Their machines thresh the rice of the village and they provide credit to the poor farmers. However, these rich farmers do not want to work with the poor towards a common objective. How is possible to create harmony in the village under such conditions?

In addition to the problem of power sharing, the farmers are confronted with problems of different interests and mentalities: between the old men and the young people, the old families and the new ones, the rice producers and the stockbreeders, the farmers equipped without debt and those who are not equipped and have huge debts.

According to a farmer from Nionbougou, there is no alternative: the villages must work together to tackle the production problem in the ON, because if they don’t, more and more powerful people (agri-businessmen) will come and absorb everyone (rich and poor farmers).

8.3.2 Erosion of the work ethic

Before the institutional Reform, the farmers believed that they worked for the ON. After the Reform, the young people stopped working. Directives (particularly those regarding the agricultural calendar and the network’s maintenance) are no longer respected by farmers. Previously, these instructions obliged them to work from the fields. The young farmers used to work in the fields from May to November. Nowadays, if their requests are not satisfied, they feel discouraged and stop working.

The controversy about the farmers’ reticence to work in the fields ‘with their own hands’ is currently very apparent in the ON. Recently, during a meeting on the decline of production in the ON zone, M. Togola, president of the APCAM (Permanent Assembly of the Agricultural Chambers of Mali), asserted that the lack of enthusiasm and the unwillingness to work is very relevant. According to Agyoun Ongoba, former ON manager converted into a rice farmer, the lack of equipment can be explained by the fact that the farmers gave up physical work. If farmers agreed to make composting (organic manure), they would reduce by 70% their work need.

Some of our interviewees think that the erosion of the work ethic is a result of the campaign ‘against children’s labour’ by the NGO Malian Association for Progress or AMAPROS (Association Malienne pour le Progrès). This NGO says that it is forbidden to exploit children; since then, young people think that they do not have to work. Previously, there were groups of young people to undertake collective tasks (15 to 20 persons), but this kind of work ethic does not exist any more.

Several of our interviewees, employees working at the ON and at the private research organizations in the region, think that the farmers refuse to work. According to these interviewees, the labour cost is higher and very heavy. As a result, young men in the villages are ‘unemployed’, women do almost all the work. In the fields, the lazy people steal the rice. It is the problem of a lack of planning in the management of work. The question is: how to manage the workforce?

9. Conflicts between the Farmer Organizations and the Office du Niger regarding the Water and the Land

The conflicts between the FOs and the ON about the water and the land should theoretically be amicably managed when the Contract Plan is revised every three years. This Contract allows any of the contractors to request a contract revision even before the end of the term. Thus, according to the ON managers, it is not clear why the farmers are always in conflict with the ON about the price of the water license and the land allocation. As explained in the introduction, one of the weaknesses of this Contract is the lack of power over water and land management (see the land tenure system and the licenses). Regarding other issues, like participative development and decentralization, the conflicts are less marked because they do not directly affect the production of rice, unlike the price of water and the shortage of land.

The conflicts between the ON and the FOs are mainly related to the payment of the water license. This can be seen from the message of the ON’s CEO broadcast on the national television for more than two months. He says the following:

‘To pay the water license is compulsory in the ON, the deadline for this payment is fixed on 31 March... This deadline is not negotiable, anyone who does not pay, at the latest on 31 March, will be evicted from the ON.’

This message is representative of the conflicts between the ON and the FOs. But how will the FOs succeed when they face so many constraints? As well as these various constraints, the land regime also undermines the farmers’ fight. Therefore, in current circumstances, the farmer’s are unlikely to succeed. The future of the farmers’ empowerment and economic performance of the 1990s have weakened the farmers’ position in the conflict over water and land. A certain number of farmer leaders think that the true cause of this conflict is the general failure of the 1990s institutional Reform. The birth of the Trade unions (SEXAGON, 1997) is a new weapon with international connections.

As we saw, the new ON’s structure generated a conflict situation which is only worsening year on year. This conflict is essentially around the management of water and land. The disagreements are the following:

9.1 Price of water and eviction of farmers from the land

For the 1994–95 campaign (the first year of the Reform), the water license payment increase was discussed with the farmers. They refused the increase. The Ministry of Rural Development and Environment had to intervene. The farmers wanted the increase to be discussed in a proper way with them with their concerns taken into account.

‘All the conflicts turn around the water license and the payment deadline’, said M. Kane from Kourouma. The farmers propose new forms of eviction such as ‘proportional eviction’ i.e., if a farmer has to pay the license fee, he must pay the same proportion of his land or he must pay the fees for the entire area including the non-paid hectares from him and not six as it currently does. The farmers also disagree with the fact that when a farmer is evicted, the ON takes the right to install whoever it wants (civil servants, traders). Another crucial issue the farmers want to understand is why the ON gives land title to private investors but refuses it to farmers.
The PEA (Farming Licence) has no legal value because even if a part of the fee is missing, the lands will be removed from the farmer. The existing land regime allows the ON to behave as a State within the State and take advantage of the dominating ideology (introduction of agribusiness and implementation of the NEPAD
d policy) to practise financially interested management of the land. For ten years the ON has been an important economic player. Several African heads of State and high political personalities, during stays in Mali, have visited the ON to view the agricultural potentialities of Mali. The positive foreign image of the ON makes Mali’s wealthiest individuals and bureaucrats try to get a piece of land at the ON before it’s too late. The lands of the small farmers disappeared for non-compliance of various directives are allocated to the newly arrived. This is why the farmers demand a change in the rules of the game. The farmers do not want the ON to be the sole owner and have requested that the AVs’ president and the leaders of the villages become co-owners.

They request co-management of the land allocation process and more transparency concerning the rights and obligations related to land, particularly the rules of eviction and inheritance law. They want land allocation rules to take women and children into account.

The farmers challenge the CEO’s double vote in all the decisions regarding land management by the Joint Committee. No legal text gives any power to the farmers over land management. Seydou Diallo, member of the Joint Committee for land management of Kouromani, said that the farmers requested legal authorization to rent the land, but the ON has not given its agreement so far. According to him, farmers are opposed to the fact that the ON gives equal treatment to those who have been settled on the irrigated lands for 40 years and those who just arrived one year ago.

9.2 Redistribution of new land parcels

The farmers say that they can express their opinion on the land allocation and reallocation procedure, but their opinions are never taken into account. The adoption of transplanting generated a reduction in land parcel size and consequently increased the number of farmers left without lands in the zone, creating grave social repercussions.

9.3 Management of the funds allocated to the maintenance of the secondary network

The allocation of 50% of the license income to the functions of the ON and 50% to the maintenance of networks is fair, but the farmers say that the part allocated to the network’s maintenance is not enough in the most degraded zones. Farmers are opposed to the reallocation of the license income from one zone to another.

Farmers request the ability to control the part of the license income allocated for maintenance. Currently farmers are supposed to pay 10% of their production to the ON and do not manage the money. They want to be kept informed about the payments made and what remains after the works.

Concerning the commitment of the three stakeholders (ON, Joint Committees and individual farmers) for the network’s maintenance, the farmers say that there are serious deficiencies in the most degraded zones. Each stakeholder denies responsibility and accuses the others.

9.4 Statistical profitability of rice

This point generates conflict because the ON and the State accept or reject any reduction in the license payment on the basis of statistical data. Farmers are unhappy with the fact that the ON has a monopoly on this matter.

The farmers do not understand how an ON agent can enter their field, mark a square off, usually where the rice is excellent, and use this to determine the productivity of the whole field. And because of this, keep the price of water the same because the rice is believed to do well. The farmers consider that productivity stays in Mali, have visited the ON to view the agricultural potentialities of Mali. The positive foreign image of the ON makes Mali’s wealthiest individuals and bureaucrats try to get a piece of land at the ON before it’s too late. The lands of the small farmers disappeared for non-compliance of various directives are allocated to the newly arrived. This is why the farmers demand a change in the rules of the game. The farmers do not want the ON to be the sole owner and have requested that the AVs’ president and the leaders of the villages become co-owners.

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resulted from some managers’ bad administration and the diversion of funds from the rice sale by the traders. The financial institutions had to stop financing some 80% of the FOs in the ON. The AVs sank, as early as the beginning of the 1990s, into a deep crisis marked also by strong social tensions in the villages. This economic failure by the FO’s generated a social climate which damaged farmer relations (collapse of AVs and proliferation of GIUs).

Following the Reform, the farmer’s status positively changed: from colonist at the colonial period, he became in the 1990s a free farmer with the status of private economic operator. However, the relationship between legal institutions and the FOs was a one-way or a competition relationship. There are three reasons for that:

- The Office du Niger did not reform itself. In 1984–85, the FOs were introduced by the sole, dictatorial political party in power between 1968–1991. Every farmer had to be a member of an FO. Membership was a mandatory condition to have access to agricultural credit. In this respect there is no difference between institutional reform. After the Reform, the ON managers were on the same level as the General Delegation of the Government in charge of the Reform of the ON, an independent structure based in Bamako. The General Delegation worked with the money and under the pressure of sponsors (see the study of GERSAR-BRL, 1993). Expensive rehabilitation works, generally financed by external sponsors, were often performed by foreign companies. This situation damaged the ON’s credibility with the farmers, and created a situation whereby the ON became dependent on external institutions in terms of funds, competences and implementation means.

The Reform was essentially inspired by financial considerations; the new missions were determined by the administration for budget reasons (number of FOs and personnel). The Office du Niger simply had to accept the missions and decisions imposed by the General Delegation of the Government.

During the process of each institutional reform, the key considerations were: financial constraints, disengagement, privatization and cost reduction. Following the Reform, farmers’ well-being ceased to be a consideration within the role of the ON. Its role is now limited to essential services: water management and the Rural Council. All other tasks (leasing, commercialisation, production materials, agricultural credit, etc.) were transferred to the local and communal authorities. The farmers began operating in the field covering land rehabilitation and development, the forge, rural infrastructures etc. They took advantage of the increase in the required license fee to fill the financial hole they have created in the ON’s budget.

In these reforms social aspects (relations between the ON and the FOs) were neglected. They are however important for the FOs and other communities. The ON is supposed to be for managers and farmers alike, as long as the relationship lacks trust and responsibility, there will be no solution to the farmers’ condition.

The Reform was explained to the farmers as being their liberation from the supervisors’ control. The transfer of activities was intended to mean economic, social and cultural independence from the former bosses. The farmers were in favor of this reform successively on the basis of their need to control the rice in their hands, and not on the decisions of the agents, who were drastically reduced. Moreover, the Rural Council was expected to wind down once the farmers knew how to use new technological innovations.

Faulty interpretation of the Reform directives put farmers and supervisors in a position of conflict. The Reform coincided with the beginnings of democracy in the country when the State executives in Mali lost their authority. Directives and rules hastily voted into being were not understood by the farmers, accustomed to a clearer system and a stricter application of law. This situation created confusion inside the village. In a village of Kourounmi, we were told that the wastefulness of the AVs was encouraged by the ON using the money from the AVs to finance the ON. The ON uses the money from the AVs, as long as the relationship lacks trust and responsibility, to divide the AVs in the village. It is the non-repayment of the loans that led to the collapse of the AVs and the creation of confusion in the village. The State is responsible because it encouraged the creation of GIEs without verifying the ethics of their members.

The withdrawal of the ON (sudden and total lack of resources, promises made to farmers which were not respected, arbitrary land allocation, financial arrears) diminished respect for the supervisors, a lack of respect that turned into distrust.

As shown by the 1993 CBI/AGS studies issues arising from the implementation of the Reform are the main factor of distrust between farmers and supervisors. For many farmers, the ON contributed to the failure of their AVs. Some ON managers even said to the AVs’ leaders that if they (the managers) wanted to divert the AV’s money there was no legal framework under which to sue them. According to the expert of the local NGO Nieta-Conseil, despite the privatization of the production units (which was perceived as dismantling the possessions of the State), the ON management team was unable to adapt to their new role as advisors. Instead they closed ranks, leading to chaos in the villages. Suspicions of scheming and favouritism spread over the ON, especially concerning land allocation or re-allocation and the management of agricultural credits.

The lack of complementarity between the interests of the ON managers and those of the farmers is clear to see. ON managers are currently not supported as they were before the Reform. They complain about the lack of promotion, the slow increase in wages and an insecure future. These managers therefore tend to grasp advantages in their own way (gaining for themselves parcels of rice land and other compensations). These actions give rise to questions about their credibility with the farmers and lead to a competition between the managers and the farmers whose land parcels were reduced or those who were disposed of their land. Instead of a complementarity of interests, this phenomenon has created a conflict of interests. The farmers accuse the managers of non-distribution of the water license monies and of the increase in the required license fee to fill the hole it gave them in the ON’s budget.

The Impact of the Micro-finance Institutions

According to Marcel Sawadogo, president of the AV of Ratenga, the farmers’ empowerment did not work because the AVs authorized unfair competition from the private sector which destroyed the farmers’ interests for several reasons:

- ‘The AVs had worked well, we should not have seen all these private structures which are currently invading the ON: the micro-finance institutions, the Project of Support to the Commercialisation of Cereals or PACCEM (Projet d’Appui à la Commercialisation des Céréales), the Service Centre or CPS (Centre de Prestation de Services), the GIEs and many other financial organisations which are only interested in their own profit. Even the license, the AVs should go and pay it themselves. Other than leaving each farmer to go and queue in front of the zone administrative direction. We knew since 1984–85 that the AVs gradually had to be turned into co-operators. They were not able to transform themselves. If today this transformation is imposed from outside it will fail again because it is a problem of management, not a problem of structure.’

According to Sawadogo, there is a problem of negative attitude towards the public sector. When the AVs let the private sector get into the ON, they ceased to function. The problem is that the ON managers inherited threshing machines from the old Office du Niger. Use of those machines entered into competition with the AVs. The farmers lost their authority. Directives and rules hastily voted into being were not understood by the farmers, expected to wind down once the farmers knew how to use new technological innovations.

Even the farmers who were able to take advantage of the institutional reforms adopted unrealistic economic attitudes. For example, rather than managing in an efficient way the land they have, they were trying instead to expand production by renting other fields. They are also often victims of community expectations after the AVs: farmers often receive too many visitors asking for free rice, and most of these people are not locals.

According to Yaoobou Touré, President of SEXAGON, the reforms did not fulfil farmers’ expectations. The farmers were expecting a better future, but unfortunately they were badly prepared for a transfer that anyway never fully happened. The ON’s management team disappeared. This created an empty space and the farmers were not able to adapt to the changes. It created a climate of public or latent disinformation among each other of being responsible for the other’s poverty. According to Touré underlined that the farmers’ poverty and their conflicts with the ON have various origins, of which the most important are the role of the micro-finance institutions and a lack of respect for the agricultural calendar. According to him, before the arrival of the micro-finance institutions the farmers’ life was easier:

‘They were living off their work, They were selling their rice to have money. Since the micro-finance was brought into the ON, the farmers became poorer. The debt to the micro-finance institutions must be paid at the same time as the water license. Thus, the farmers are obliged to sell their rice for nothing. The farmers work for the micro-finance. Before the farmers were more united. Today they all work for the micro-finance institution."

Adding ‘productivity is negatively affected by the lack of adherence to the agricultural calendar. Each one does what he wants; there is no follow-up by the supervisors; the farmers think: I have some water, I don’t need to wait for any date; it proves that the supervision is nonexistent. The new CEO wants to restrict the farmers’ activity. They have lost their authority."

Faliry Boly, General Secretary of the Farmer Professional Organizations’ Association or AOPP (Association des Organizations Professionelles Paysannes) recognizes that the various reforms in the ON have weakened the farmers. There is too much poverty. But there has also been a ‘mind opening’ process. He thinks this is more important than poverty. He believes that the institutional reforms are globally positive. It has been hard but some farmers gained from it. The AVs managed to create community projects, but there are many top managers who own parcels of land and do not even come to the ON. They employ labourers under the farmers’ supervision to farm their fields.’

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even came from Paris. He thinks that the private investors (agribusiness) must be relocated away from the zones of expansion of the family farms. As explained above, the new ON architecture has been imposed from the outside. The farmers and the supervisors somehow tried to fit in. They were neither the initiators, nor the implementers of the Reform. Fee was successful. They were successful for only three out of twenty years of their existence. This failure has created a climate of distrust between the FOs and the ON (See study CBI/AGS 1993).

The Reform was badly understood. For example, the privatization of some units was considered by farmers and by some agents as the selling-off of State properties. It generated suspicions of favour, especially among the owners of the farmers' villages, the Reform exacerbated latent social tensions when power was transferred to the FOs. These are mainly associated with fights between various ethnic groups and divergent interests: old men against young people, local families against newly settled ones, equipped and debt-free farmers against farmers with debt and without equipment.

We pretend that the new phenomenon was hastily imposed and managed like a military garrison. But the lack of respect for rules and legal directives created conditions leading to the disorganization of the FOs and the fall in the levels of production. We can mention among others:

- The impurity of the AVs managers who diverted large sums of money
- The frauds of the ON employees who monopolized the subsidies
- The financial institutions who badly explained the conditions of taking on debt
- The increase of non-resident farmers

From the study 'The social stake for a Restructured Office du Niger' (L'enjeu social pour un Office du Niger Restructuré) (1993), we can quote the following, which characterizes the real situation after the Reform: 'The Office du Niger does not exist any more, therefore each one need to protect its own interests'.

Given this situation of uncertainty, some farmers started to act without taking into account irrigation rules: they diverted the works and refused to maintain the tertiary networks and to pay the license and the agricultural credits. Breeders let their animals graze in other farmers' fields. The ON authorities could not put an end to these problems: the lack of trust in the ON authorities meant that farmers ignored decisions on eviction made by the ON.

During our fieldwork, an ON senior official said that only three AVs out of 160 (Fobougou, Yangassadiou Kana and Seriwala) are more or less able to fulfill the tasks they were entrusted with by the reform.

11. Conclusion

The Improving Institutions For Pro-Growth Report (see IPPG website35) may present the FOs’ malfunctioning in terms of the quality of the legal institutions and of the economic and social organizations.

However, we can pay attention to the fact that the human interrelations. In other words, the social relationship between farmers and the State supervisors on the one hand, and between the farmers themselves on the other hand, in the management of institutions and farmer organizations.

The consideration of the social and cultural aspects presented in this pilot study is relevant. It gives a better understanding of the farmers' judgments on the legal institutions and their managers. The farmers assess the institutions in terms of the behaviour and personality of their managers. Their attitude towards the institutions depends on their understanding of the social relations in these institutions.

The new ON's institutional architecture should have led to complementary relations between the legal institutions and the FOs. These relations were supposed to provide the farmers with an exchange of paid services: on one side, the ON, supplier of water and technical advice, and on the other farmers, payers of the water license. However, for a vast majority of farmers, the Reform has meant that the one who has abandoned the ON. This feeling of abandonment and of economic and social failure gave birth to a social climate which was unfavourable to any partnership between the FOs and the ON for a pro-poor growth, which led to the contesting of the legal institutions, the exacerbation of conflicts and a generalized in corruption in the FOs and the ON.

A positive transition towards a pro-poor growth requires a relation of complementarity between the various entities of the reform (FOs, legal and financial institutions and private investors). Instead, the Reform created conditions that generated wild competition between these entities, where the strongest always wins. Who won then? The traders of Bamako, the micro-finance institutions, the ON managers and the other bureaucrats of big cities’ answer the farmers.

According to the farmers, the losers in the new institutional architecture means that the Reform has created a social climate not only unfavourable for good collaboration between farmers but also unfavourable for a partnership between the FOs and the ON. The financial considerations of the Reform created competition where only a minority controlled the rules of the game. To understand this situation we need to look at the land's legal definition of roles of the FOs and the ON. Have the farmers’ roles and competencies been well defined?

11.1 What have we learnt?

In 1984–85, the State created the AVs to promote growth in the farming sector. The results are mixed: initially productivity quickly increased and the farmers were freed, but they then fell into a tiring poverty trap. At this point, with degenerating AVs, the Government launched the Reform in 1994: this was the AVs’ death. Other farmer groupings were created instead, but their life was even shorter than that of the AVs. The ON population quadrupled and there is not enough land. More than a third of the ON farmers are obliged to get into debt every year to get some food during the off-season months. Production has fallen everywhere (between 2 and 3 tons/ha) and the number of evicted farmers increases every year. The farmers no longer consider the development of the family farms, imposed in 2002 to introduce agribusiness and attract private investors through a system of leases as a solution to the lack of rehabilitated lands. How will this new option respond to the needs of the poor farmers?

The idea of a lease governed by the law is an innovation of the ON's technical and managerial staff. They claim that the lease holders (mostly agribusiness) respect the measures of application and the specifications of the lease.

For the interviewed farmers, the story is different. The system of leases disadvantages the family farms. Consequently, they are against the lease. The reasons are many. Many people consider that the leases benefit the rule of rehabilitated lands rather than the farmers. In the eyes of the farmers, these lease holders are only land speculators who resell the land to the farmers, do not honour their engagements (lack of respect for specified rules, non-payment of the water license) and are never threatened with eviction. The lease holders exploit the lands allocated to them in a capitalist way without any consideration for poor farmers. With the leases, farmers have no possibility to turn the leases to other farmers. In response to these comments, certain lease holders admit that they are the ‘black sheep’ in this story by not respecting all the clauses of the lease. But they add that a response to this should not go as far as cancelling the lease. On the contrary, they say, the mutualism of the lease should be encouraged by the farmers, because the success of the policy requires the collaboration of all stakeholders.

For the ON, the lease remains the means by which to take up the challenge of developing all the usable lands and to require the rehabilitation of the family farms. But the farmers are also increasing the generation of a mixed: initially productivity quickly increased and the farmers were freed, but they then fell into a tiring poverty trap. At this point, with degenerating AVs, the Government launched the Reform in 1994: this was the AVs’ death. Other farmer groupings were created instead, but their life was even shorter than that of the AVs. The ON population quadrupled and there is not enough land. More than a third of the ON farmers are obliged to get into debt every year to get some food during the off-season months. Production has fallen everywhere (between 2 and 3 tons/ha) and the number of evicted farmers increases every year. The farmers no longer consider the development of the family farms, imposed in 2002 to introduce agribusiness and attract private investors through a system of leases as a solution to the lack of rehabilitated lands. How will this new option respond to the needs of the poor farmers?

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to become the workforce of the big investors? It is likely anyway that, if these private investors come in large numbers to the ON, the young farmers will not hesitate to sell them their family land.

11.2 Reinforcement of the Farmer Organizations

In order to take the concerns of the farmers into account, the FOs need to be assisted in their functioning and duties. According to our interviewees, this assistance should consist of multiform support aiming at correcting the weak performance of the FOs. To achieve this, the most often proposed measures for improvement are:

- provide training to the FOs leaders to eliminate illiteracy. Appropriate training in project management and literacy should strengthen the farmers’ leadership;
- develop the FOs capacity to manage their economic activities in order to reduce their financial dependence;
- strengthen the structure of the FOs to allow the best organized AVs to become cooperative companies, and allow them regroup in local, regional and national chapters;
- provide regular advice to the FOs to support their initiatives;
- organise the FOs for a better implementation of the transferred tasks: supplying, equipment, trading, credit;
- assure transparent functioning of the FOs by paying particular attention to the social composition of the leader authorities and to the quality of their members;
- assure a regular follow-up of the FOs activities.

Any assistance should follow the priorities of the farmers and must allow the FOs’ leaders to acquire the necessary skills. An information and sensitization programmeme must be a cornerstone of any programmeme of assistance.

11.3 Should co-operatives replace the Village Associations?

A solution to the constraints suffered by the FO’s and to the farmers’ poverty is the creation of co-operatives to replace the AVs. The introduction of co-operatives in the ON is not a taboo any more. The law to implement the co-operatives has been in place since 2001. According to some ON managers, the implementation of co-operatives is a Government decision and the ON is not directly associated with this decision. The new co-operatives are considered to have more transparent management. Contrary to the opaque managers of the AVs, the co-operative managers are financially accountable to a Board of Directors with the power to punish anyone who diverts money. The criteria on the number of members are simplified: ten farmers can get together and create a co-operative. Some people think that the AVs need to exist along with and independently from the co-operatives. They want the State to make a critical assessment of the AVs and TVs before imposing the co-operatives to the farmers. SEXAGON is happy to circulate the co-operative legal texts on the internet. Its European partners can then analyse them and send their comments and suggestions. The APCAM (Permanent Assembly of the Agriculture Chambers of Mali) plans to resolve the commercialization problem with the creation of co-operatives. However, according to Ongoîba, ‘it is not a matter of co-operative or AV, the real problem is that the farmers get into debt and refuse to pay it back. They want to be rich, to have luxury things without reimbursing their loan; that is why they fail.’

How can the objective specified in the Contract Plan between the State, the ON and the farmers be achieved under these conditions? Namely: national self-sufficiency in rice and the export of surpluses to neighbour countries? (see Proposition of Contract Plan, 1995)

The study Evaluation de la Pauvreté en Zone Office du Niger (Evaluation of Poverty in the Office du Niger Zone, 2005) shows that if the ON wants to fight against poverty, it is necessary to put in place a strategy to extend the rehabilitated land surface, to provide land security and to give access to the rehabilitated lands to the family farms. ‘If the development of agribusiness in the Office du Niger zone is to be promoted, the fight against poverty has to provide the small family farms with rehabilitated lands and the farmers’ representatives have to be strongly involved at all levels in the management of the hydro-agricultural development. The securities planned for the private investors must be applied to the farms as well.’ (Kébé, Demba et al., 2005:144)

In parallel to the rehabilitation of the land and to the enlargement of the family parcels, the Government must also elaborate a programme to strengthen the FOs.

While waiting for the implementation of these measures recommended by researchers and FOs managers, the farmers wonder how they will escape poverty when the rice remaining after the harvest and after having paid production costs is only enough to feed them for one or two months: ‘unless the production costs are cut, the fight against poverty will be vain in the ON’. 

37. We obtained a copy of this law from the Ministry for Social Development and Solidarity with Elderly People (Law N01 076, 18 July 2001). A presentation note about the co-operative law illustrates the main motivations behind the adoption of this new law, including:

- the hybrid nature of the AVs and TVs and their unclear division of functions with the villages’ functions;
- the lack of legal status for the AVs;
- the economic and social context of the country;
- the non-democratic management of the former co-operatives;

After having analysed the co-operatives created in 1981 and AVs created in 1985, the National Direction for the Co-operative Action proposed this new law regarding the co-operatives.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAI :</td>
<td>Association Indigène Autochtone Agricultural Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACA :</td>
<td>Association Coopération Agricole Agricultural Co-operative Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADRAO :</td>
<td>Association pour le Développement de la Riziculture en Afrique de l’Ouest Association for the Development of the Production of Rice in West Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMAPROS :</td>
<td>Association Malienne pour le Progrès Malian Association for Progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARPON :</td>
<td>Projet d’Amélioration de la Riziculture Paysanne à l’Office du Niger Improvement of the Production of Rice in the Office of the Niger</td>
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<tr>
<td>APCAM :</td>
<td>Assemblée Permanente des Chambres d’Agriculture Permanent Assembly of the Agriculture Chambers of Mali</td>
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<td>AV :</td>
<td>Association Villageoise Village Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDM :</td>
<td>Banque de Développement du Mali Mali Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>BNDA :</td>
<td>Banque Nationale de Développement Agricole National Agricultural Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAE :</td>
<td>Contrat Annuel d’Exploitation Annual Farming Contract</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPGFE :</td>
<td>Comité Paritaire de Gestion des Fonds d’Entretien du Réseau Hydraulique Joint Committee for the Management of the secondary hydraulic network maintenance fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPGT :</td>
<td>Comité Paritaire de Gestion des Terres Joint Committee for Land Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPS :</td>
<td>Centre de Prestation des Services Service Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDV :</td>
<td>Fonds de Développement Villageois Fund for the Village Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>GIE :</td>
<td>Groupement d’Intérêt Economique Groupings of Economic Interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>GIEF :</td>
<td>Groupement d’Intérêt Economique des Femmes Groupings of Economic Interest for Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIEM :</td>
<td>Groupement d’Intérêt Economique des Hommes Groupings of Economic Interest for Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPPG :</td>
<td>Improving Institutions For Pro – Poor Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ON :</td>
<td>Office du Niger</td>
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<tr>
<td>OP :</td>
<td>Organization Paysanne Farmer Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>ONG :</td>
<td>Organization Non Gouvernementale Non Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEPAD :</td>
<td>Nouveau Partenariat pour le Développement de l’Afrique New Partnership for Africa’s Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>PACCEM :</td>
<td>Projet d’Appui à la Commercialisation des Céréales Project of Support to the Commercialisation of Cereals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEA :</td>
<td>Permis d’Exploitation Annuelle Farming License</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEXAGON :</td>
<td>Syndicat des Exploitants Agricoles de l’Office du Niger Union of the Farmers of the ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYNADEC :</td>
<td>Syndicat des Agriculteurs, Elevateurs et Céréaliers Union of Farmers, Breeders and Cereal Producers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV :</td>
<td>Tons Villageois Village Tons</td>
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<tr>
<td>UDPM :</td>
<td>Union Démocratique du Peuple Malien Democratic Union of the People of Mali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UC :</td>
<td>Unités Coopératives Co-operative Units</td>
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