

Local Powers and the Co-delivery of Public Goods in Niger

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Abstract The provision of public goods in Niger involves in almost all cases complex forms of co-production, with several actors and 'modes of governance' contributing within a variety of delivery configurations. How well goods are provided, and whether key bottlenecks in provision are able to be overcome, depends on the precise terms on which this collaboration occurs. This article explores these issues drawing on fieldwork carried out in three urban sites in 2009. Focusing on provision in the fields of water and sanitation, safe motherhood, public security and markets, it suggests the importance of formal or informal coordination mechanisms; the role of 'local reformers' in exploiting windows of opportunity created by the initiatives of development partners; a variety of kinds of 'informal privatisation' and *de facto* co-funding of public services, and the ability of private corporate bodies to take effective charge of some types of public goods provision.

1 Introduction

This article provides a provisional synthesis of the results obtained from anthropological fieldwork carried out in 2009 on the delivery of four 'public goods' (water and sanitation, safe motherhood, security and markets) in three sites in Niger (Balleyara, Say and Guidan Roumdji).¹ The research found that all the public goods selected corresponded to real shared preoccupations among the local populations, who have high expectations and consider the state and local political authorities to have responsibilities in these matters. All of the four goods are thus elements of a wider shared sense of the general interest.

Analysis of the concrete delivery of these public goods was the point of departure for the empirical research; this revealed that the delivery modes are aggregates of various components, each of which poses specific delivery problems. The diversity of these components requires that we distinguish them carefully, because the bottlenecks, the infrastructural requirements and the actors involved vary from one component to the other. We call the combination of actors, institutions and means which permit the delivery of a public good, its *delivery configuration*. This configuration is made up of a number of *component configurations*.

For instance, the particular delivery configuration of the component 'evacuation of patient in case of obstructed pregnancy' includes as essential actors the midwife or nurse, people who are able to pay for the transport, the ambulance driver, elements of the FNIS (National Security Corps) and a functioning operating theatre and blood supplies at the referral centre. It also assumes the availability of the ambulance itself and the means of obtaining it. The general configuration for the delivery of babies involves in addition, traditional birth attendants (TBAs) and trained TBAs (*matrones*), the mayor's office, the President's Special Programme, various projects supporting maternal health, and even the chiefdom, as well as a staffed and equipped health unit, and maintenance procedures for the ambulance.

Critical bottlenecks and collective action problems tend to arise at the level of the component configurations, which means that different solutions may be needed for each kind of component. In the case of safe childbirth, for instance, three bottlenecks stand out, all three concerning the treatment of obstructed pregnancies: (1) in the case of delivery, which starts at home, the rapidity of the evacuation to a health unit; (2) the rapidity of the evacuation from the health unit to a functional operating

theatre; and (3) the existence of a functional operating theatre at the level of the district hospital, with qualified staff who are available – and blood.

Our selected public goods were delivered through a multiplicity of modes of governance. The overall delivery configurations therefore involved combinations of actors and modes of governance with various forms of co-production: collaboration, substitution, competition, complementarity. The modes of governance are associated with specific kinds of accountabilities. In the absence of formal coordinating frameworks situated at some superior level, *the actors and institutions which contribute to the co-delivery of a service are subject to non-commensurable particular accountabilities*. The official is *bureaucratically* accountable to his head of service; the mayor is *representationally* accountable to his commune council and his electors; the Chief is *reputationally* accountable to his peers and to his family (that is, to his subjects); the local non-governmental organisation (NGO) is *financially* accountable to the international NGO that sponsors it, and so on.

After a brief description of the historical context, we proceed to describe how these public goods are delivered by different institutional modes of governance. We then present some variables that may influence the quality of the delivery. Among them, coordination between local actors and institutions appears decisive, in a context where public goods are generally co-delivered in a mix of formal and informal arrangements.

2 The historical context

We should recall that it was through colonialism that the modern state came to Niger, and that the form of public goods delivery it adopted was a particularly despotic one. At independence, the single party (RDA) ruled the country in a way that continued to be autocratic and very 'state-centric', with party committees at all levels. The military regime of Kountché which followed produced an upsurge of concern for discipline, at the same time creating a mass youth organisation, the *samaria*, as a form of local mobilisation and collective action (although under strong central control).

With the National Conference in 1991, the country entered a democratic phase which was somewhat turbulent but marked by a number of

new factors: the legacy of structural adjustment; years of unpaid salaries; the rolling back of the state from certain of its service functions and areas of authority; and the coming of multipartyism and electoral patronage. The two main characteristics of this period were: (1) the conversion of the political and state elite to unbridled forms of competitive political patronage, fuelled by growing business involvement and the hegemony of big traders; and (2) an increased dependence on aid.

The characterisation of democracy as a state of 'anarchy', where indiscipline, corruption and division prevail, is a frequent theme among our interlocutors. It certainly captures something of the truth, but also a certain nostalgic idealisation of the past under the military dictatorship. The fact that public services functioned better in that era is also due to a number of co-factors (and thus not only to the vertical, authoritarian and repressive character of public management under Kountché): the 'boom' in uranium revenues which took place in that period; a much smaller population, and fewer services delivered to a much smaller percentage of it; a more limited and less complex bureaucracy; growing indebtedness and external assistance that was more flexible than it became under structural adjustment, etc.

In 2004, a new mode of local governance emerged: 256 *communes* were created, with, for the first time, elected councils and mayors.

We cannot develop here the historical dynamics of our four public goods. However, to summarise, two types of delivery emerged over time: for certain goods, there has been a progressive transformation of the delivery conditions since the pre-colonial era (markets and water); for other goods, there has been a rupture between the old conditions of delivery and those that apply today (security, sanitation and safe motherhood).

Finally, the studied goods are connected in different ways to the outside world, the 'global economy' and international expertise. While the markets are linked to their production sources in China, Dubai or Europe, their modes of organisation are primarily domestic and engage little with the outside. By contrast, water and sanitation, which figure among the Millennium

Development Goals (MDGs), increasingly involve techniques and procedures which are standardised at world level. The same is true of safe motherhood, which follows schemas promoted by the World Health Organization (WHO) in all countries of the South. Finally, security is a highly national and local affair (in regard to the official monopoly at least), paradoxically largely disconnected from the internationally coordinated 'terrorism' issue.

3 Provision of the four public goods by modes of local governance

3.1 The bureaucratic mode: weaknesses and paradoxes of the state presence

Although the state is present everywhere and its external signs are numerous, its presence is in fact not very effective, with its agents often demobilised, frustrated and demotivated. The state remains a central actor in regard to health and security, but is much less effective in water and markets.

A real territorial network

The presence of the state is manifested, first of all, by its official representatives, the governors, prefects and sub-prefects, who have authority over all the de-concentrated public services (and also have oversight of the *communes*). Health is without doubt the public service that is best organised, best structured, most embedded and most functional. The forces of order (*gendarmerie* and national security forces, FNIS) also cover the whole territory. Contrary to widespread ideas about 'the retreat of the state', these professional bodies are expanding. Others, in contrast, are declining or are seeing their functions transformed, like the water technicians. But the 'real' operation of these services, far from meeting their declared objectives and satisfying users' expectations, is often criticised by the latter.

Serious under-provision of materials and means of operation

The poverty of the state services is spectacular. Certainly, all the services are represented in the prefectures and the *communes*, not only on paper but in terms of staff establishments, but they do not have quarters worthy of the name, and they lack materials, means of operating and means of transport. For water, the departmental services are limited to a single agent who has no vehicle and no office. The forces of order in the three case study districts have <10% of the fuel

allocation that they require to perform their mission, and virtually no functioning vehicles. The operating budget of the community development service in Balleyara is 60.000 CFA Fr per year (<100 Euros) and even this is not always disbursed.

Only the health services seem to at least function, well or badly, at the lowest level (with nursing officers), thanks to cost recovery. In fact, payment for medical services (user fees) does permit the provision of generic medications. However, serious operational problems persist in the referral chain, like the absence of blood supplies in district hospitals. As for equipment, situations vary greatly from one health unit to another, particularly at the level of district hospitals, and also according to whether there is a development partner (DP) active in the field or not.

Human resource problems

In such a state of deprivation, the state agents who are present on site but lacking means of working are often discouraged. In technical services like water, hygiene and sanitation, community development, livestock and agriculture, there is in general just one agent, isolated and out of practice, occasionally two (most often a national service conscript).

In contrast, the health personnel are more numerous, especially the auxiliaries (clinical or outreach assistants, first-aid workers, trained TBAs, community health workers and managers), badly paid or not paid at all. But for them there are two problems. On the one hand, the hierarchy of the health service has great difficulty in managing postings in a coherent way. The more distant CSIs (base-level health units), even if they serve many clients, have only one nursing officer, whereas in important centres there is sometimes a plethora of personnel. Reform-minded doctors seldom remain for long in one place. As for the midwives, they pose a problem that is well known in health circles. They refuse to be posted to rural areas or, if they live in one, they refuse to be moved, 'pulling strings' in various quarters to get their way. The influence they mobilise may be local, as in the case of the immovable midwife in Guidan Roudji (known as the 'queen mother') who is protected by her brother, the canton chief. But the interventions can also come from highly placed officials in the national political or

administrative system who are the spouses or parents of the midwives (Jaffré and Prual 1993).

In addition, the behaviour of the health personnel presents numerous problems. It is severely criticised by service users, who refer to absenteeism, contempt, abusive treatment and rackets.

Creative improvisation and informal privatisation

But non-respect for official norms and procedures can also be the effect of a desire to do better at delivering the expected services. Thus the mayor can, by paying for the fuel, mobilise a patrol by the forces of order without going through the prefect. A village chief can ask a nurse to treat a patient on credit, under his guarantee. An ambulance can evacuate a pregnant woman directly to Niamey or Maradi instead of passing through the district hospital, as required by the regulations. Traders may be permitted to declare themselves mere 'hawkers' in order to be able to make use of socially subsidised water sources.

The most positive examples of this are the various improvisations used by the anaesthetist and surgeon's assistant in Guidan Roundji, who, very much contrary to the official rules, undertakes basic surgical interventions (including caesareans) at the district hospital often because the doctor is not present. The personal factor appears to be an important element.

These various ways of 'making do' are also more and more taking on a monetised form, in the sense that provision by state agents is being financed by users or third parties in default of being paid for by the state itself. This informal privatisation at the level of everyday living has become almost institutionalised, and it allows goods of general interest to be provided to some degree in spite of the failures of the state. The most striking example is security. The costs (fuel and per diems) of off-base patrols and interventions in conflicts in the countryside by the *gendarmérie* and FNIS are paid either by the mayor's office, by contributions by peasants collected by the chiefs, or by the complainant himself. These non-official practices are not concealed and are approved *de facto* by the representatives of the state, the prefects (who themselves make use of some of the patrols). One might also mention the 'hiring' of elements

of the FNIS at Balleyara by big traders to assure the security of their truck convoys. It is worth noting that the per diems issued to the security forces (6,500 CFA Fr per day per man) are significant compared with their salaries, and amount to a 'topping up' of their income. Informal privatisation is thus not just a practical device for making it possible to deliver the service; it also benefits the providers themselves.

There is of course another side to informal privatisation; it can become a racket, benefiting only the providers to the detriment of the users. This happens for example when the forces of order entrap the fishermen of Say at night, or the midwives take excessive amounts of money from expectant mothers.

3.2 The project-based mode

Development partners have become unavoidable actors in the local delivery of public goods, making up to some extent for the shortcomings of the state, at the same time by providing public services with some of the means of operation that they lack, and substituting for them by means of direct interventions or the promotion of associational structures.

At least 13 external actors were present in the three sites. Most often, the interventions are not coordinated, each DP or NGO having its own action programme. The state services officially in charge of coordination (Community Development) and the mayors complain of never receiving reports or of being sidelined (in particular for water: *'Each of them put their wells where they like'*). The DP interventions are unequally distributed between the public goods and their basic components: on security and on water quality for example, they are little involved. Some of the main bottlenecks are thus ignored by projects, each of which pursues its own particular logic, searching out problems for the solutions it is offering (Naudet 1999).

External aid can be about infrastructure or about operational inputs, training, or finally management systems (these elements often being combined).

The bulk of local investment is thus the work of projects. Neither the *communes* nor the state have real budgets for investment using their own funds, and all work in the expectation of

eventual external finance. Markets are typical: while the *communes*, like the state, depend on the taxes raised in markets for their main local revenues, they do not invest a single franc in these markets, and in the three sites the rehabilitation of the locales and the construction of modern infrastructure has been the work of DPs (a German project, FICOD, invested 200 million CFA Fr in Balleyara). Modern tube wells, mini-irrigation systems and human-labour pumps, are all financed by projects.

With respect to operational expenditures, the role of projects is more difficult to capture. It is very variable across the services, sometimes they complement an effort by the state or the *communes* and sometimes they constitute the only real resource. In health, external interventions are of the ‘complementary’ type, in particular in the form of ‘vertical’ programmes like the general provision for patient-centred antenatal consultations, or the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS. In contrast, water services work only with the support of projects, either in the form of help to *communes*, villages or groups of individuals to set up projects, or in the form of monitoring, but always with some specific financial assistance from the project. The distribution of trainings of all sorts among local actors is another important activity, one which constantly mobilises human resources in the three sites and is entirely project-financed. The TBAs are an example of a group trained in this way.

Finally, the interventions of projects under the infrastructure or operational inputs headings also imply the importation of a certain amount of institutional engineering, in other words, new structures, new procedures and new management systems. An important part of this institutional engineering by DPs is the pressure on ‘communities’ to create committees that will then manage development funds and infrastructures, in the name of ‘participation’.

3.3 The associational mode

Four types of association may be identified. The first type is inspired by development projects. The funding of the rehabilitation of the three markets and the support to household waste management was accompanied by a strong pressure for the creation of management or neighbourhood committees. In Guidan Roudmji,

with the support of SNV (the Netherlands Development Organisation), this was initially successful: the garbage carters, recruited with the help of the neighbourhood chiefs, were paid regularly thanks to the contributions of 50 CFA Fr per household. But following political conflicts, the family heads began little by little to refuse to pay the contributions, and the carters, not having been paid, refused to continue to work and started making private use of the carts. An almost identical scenario took place in Say. The market management committees that were established in Balleyara and Guidan Roudmji by the municipalities also collapsed. The aim was different in this case: it was to exercise control over the tax collectors (nominated by the mayors’ offices on political criteria) who were suspected of diverting part of the revenue. But these committees quickly became in their turn the object of accusations of misappropriation.

Another type of association has been created on a nationwide scale by the state in order to associate communities with new public policies. Typical are the management committees created for health units after the Bamako Initiative for the implementation of cost-recovery. They are composed of representatives of the population, and oversee cost recovery, the local recruitment and payment of auxiliaries, and the purchase of medicines. Whatever the difficulties of these committees, they have permitted a broadly satisfactory functioning of the cost-recovery system and the provision of medicines, providing a real ‘voice’ to users and offering a right of oversight to local notables. They operate routinely throughout the country, on the basis of internally generated resources and without injections from projects. The health committees at district and regional level have sometimes taken the initiative to finance the costs of evacuations (fuel and personnel costs) by taking a few ‘additional pennies’ from all the users of health centres (in other words, a tax, including on those patients exempted from fees under the policy of free care).

A third type is associational structures locally created to compensate for the ‘gaps’ in state service provision, while laying claim to a public-interest mission. The obvious example is in the field of security: youth militias called *yambanga* which, in Balleyara and Guidan Roudmji, patrol the city at night. This type of association is a

joint effort to meet a social need: others are the *tontines* (savings groups) which provide help for marriages, baptisms or births.

It is worth noting that the last two associational types work with local resources (users' fees for the health management committees, donations or subscriptions for the *yambanga*, contributions for the *tontines*).

But by chance, we also came across an unexpected fourth type of association, which appears quite efficient and effective: corporate private-sector bodies, formal (transport unions) or informal (cattle brokers, butchers). The bus stations in the three towns are entirely managed by the bus owners' and drivers' unions: from the organisation of the duty roster for managing passengers to the collection of the *commune* departure tax from the owners, and security surveillance, all is taken in hand by the unions. They use a system of teams and an allocation formula for the funds collected which is very complex but totally functional. In Say, the transporters' association even pays a labourer to sweep the station, which is particularly clean. The sale of livestock through brokers is an older arrangement, but the latter have adapted to modern market sale conditions and have little by little put in place a complex and functional system, with a menu of charges for each type of livestock detailing precisely what is due to the broker. The abattoirs too are managed in an apparently satisfactory way by the associations of butchers. These different corporate bodies, organised on a local basis, are nevertheless present in every town in Niger, and their only source of revenue is payments by customers.

3.4 The municipal mode

Decentralisation is recent: the *communes* with their municipal councils and elected mayors were only created in 2004. It is also a troubled process. The state has failed to deliver the promised subventions or even to pass onto them the taxes which are their due, showing itself more concerned to control and even repress them than to support them. For their part, the mayors, generally elected on the basis of local coalitions between parties, have been challenged a great deal, and sometimes deposed, mostly on the basis of suspicions of misappropriation. In nearly two-thirds of *communes*, there have been attempts to depose mayors, and in nearly one-third, they

have been successful. This testifies both to the importance of local factional struggles and to the role played by the 'room for suspicion' that is a feature of collective management.

Despite these undoubted problems, particularly lack of budgetary resources and absentee mayors, the *communes* have in the space of a few years made themselves indispensable. The mayors have taken a prominent place among the important actors in the local arena, especially at the level of the administrative centre of the canton. The budgets, insufficient as they may be, and whatever the weaknesses in their management, contribute in a non-negligible fashion to the provision of goods of general interest.

Because the markets are the principal resource for the *communes*, the latter have recruited a network of tax collectors who have replaced those previously nominated by the chiefs, and they have been active everywhere in increasing the rate of tax recovery. But the mayor's office puts little back into the markets from its own resources, and relies on external projects when it comes to infrastructure.

Mayors are only marginally involved in security and health, limited to putting a little money into the maintenance or repair of *gendarmerie* vehicles or the ambulance. They have no authority over the forces of order or over health personnel. Nevertheless, they have been involved in the efforts to provide the needed extra pennies for evacuations, and indeed in Balleyara it was the mayor's office that took the initiative.

3.5 The chiefly mode

The district chiefs (*chefs de canton*) who are the most important and by far the most prestigious level of the administrative chiefdom (Tidjani Alou 2009), have been deprived of certain of their competences in favour of the mayors. In particular, they no longer have authority over markets. But they retain more or less officially two functions: the collection of personal levies (the *commune* tax) on behalf of the mayor's office; and primary-level hearings on divorce cases and rural conflicts (like land disputes or the conflicts between agriculturalists and herders). They continue to maintain courtiers and 'horsemen' in their service. At the village level, where the municipalities are absent, the

village chiefs remain the only real form of public authority. The mayors refer to them, as do other agents who have matters to pursue in the rural milieu.

Today the chiefs, who were and remain auxiliaries of the state, are thus condemned to collaborate with the mayors' offices as they did previously (and still do) with the prefects and other services of the state.

The district chiefs also retain important influence through two channels: on the one hand, they are by right members of the *commune* councils (on a consultative basis); on the other hand, they 'place' and protect their 'kinsmen and dependants' at the level of various local structures (municipal council, management committees, health personnel, garbage carters, etc.). This influence by way of clientelism can block reforms and creates a local bottleneck, as in Guidan Roundji where the 'queen mother' and other kin of the canton chief employed in the health sector seem to be 'untouchables' whom it is impossible to move despite innumerable complaints about their behaviour.

Finally, the district chiefs may play from time to time a 'broker' role in regard to projects (as in Guidan Roundji for the rehabilitation of the wells).

3.6 The merchant mode

Around the edges of the delivery of the four general-interest goods, a multiplicity of small jobs has flowered, filling gaps in the delivery chain or becoming grafted onto it, for example for water and sanitation, there are plumbers, cesspool emptiers, well-diggers and masons, water sellers, and supervisors of standpipes and latrines; for health, private nurses, birth attendants, guards, handymen and ambulance drivers. Sometimes, these small trades give rise to a small rural artisan business, such as the fabrication of plastic bags of 'pure' water.

In two of our three sites, large private companies are also present. SEEN (Société d'Exploitation des Eaux du Niger, a subsidiary of the international group Veolia) distributes water in Say and Guidan Roundji. But they are blamed for not guaranteeing the continuity and quality of the service, for unduly frequent interruptions and, in Guidan Roundji, for the bad taste of the

water. SONITEL (Société Nigérienne de Téléphone) and NIGELEC (Société Nigérienne d'Electricité) have installations in the *commune* of Say and on this basis should pay significant taxes to the *commune*. But they accumulate arrears which the *commune* is unable to recover.

4 Some potential variables relevant for the quality of service delivery

The variables which might explain better performance in the delivery of the four goods are particularly difficult to identify. Nevertheless, some tentative 'potential explanatory variables' may be proposed.

4.1 Coordination among local actors and institutions

Coordination seems to be by far the most important factor. Monopolies of provision no longer exist, if they ever really did. No mode of local governance, no institution and no privileged actor is a sole player in respect of any of the goods. Given that there is nearly always a variety of delivery configurations, what matters are *the conditions under which each delivery configuration optimises or not the possibilities for collective action, and tackles the bottlenecks identified for each good.*

Complex delivery configurations pose coordination problems. Rather than considering collective action problems in an abstract and formal way, our research analyses the constraints in a specific context: what coordination between which actors is necessary for the provision of which goods (with what components) and at what level of quality? The coordination remains almost always informal, and is dependent on the good will of local actors: there is no global framework overarching the various forms of local co-delivery, no higher instance of coordination.

It is possible to distinguish two distinct families of local delivery configurations, in which collective action problems are posed in different ways. In one, co-delivery is organised in order to mitigate the weaknesses of an officially monopolistic but in practice dysfunctional bureaucratic mode of governance. Where there is complete absence of the state bureaucracy, the configurations are polycentric.

In the case of security and safe motherhood, co-production is improvised on the ground, in order to 'save' the users, partly because the official providers, the security forces and the public

health system are not in a position to deliver their goods in a satisfactory fashion. Lack of resources is obviously a major cause of this. It is only the mobilisation of other actors and institutions that allows a minimal service to be provided. In other words, these two goods are provided through what are basically 'rescue' or 'recovery' configurations.

It is in the security sector (officially a monopoly of the state) that the informal collaboration is most surprising. The off-base patrols of the *gendarmérie* in response to land conflicts, using their vehicle and including the participation of the FNIS (no vehicle), also involve the collaboration of some of the 'horsemen' of the chief. Fuel is paid for by contributions from the population collected by the village chiefs or by a donation from the mayor's office.

For maternal health, the evacuations are only possible thanks to an ambulance provided by the Special Programme of the former President of the Republic, but this involves a nurse, a member of the FNIS, while fuel and ancillary costs are paid for either by a tax imposed (illegally) on the users of the health centre, or by the family of the expectant mother, by an insurance scheme or the mayor's office.

For the other two public goods, the bureaucratic mode of governance is no longer a central provider. Their delivery configurations are therefore polycentric and 'splintered' across parallel institutions. Rather than coordinating, they intervene separately, each with its own programme, and undertaking its own actions. For example, when it comes to wells, each development project does its own drilling using its own criteria. The markets are divided into distinct spaces (central market, livestock market, bus terminal, abattoir, etc.), each of which has its own modes of organisation.

There is nevertheless one institutionalised coordination framework, limited to the very specific domain of conflict over land issues. The Land Commissions (COFOs; official bodies at all governmental levels) agree common norms, stabilise land tenure and identify those with legitimate claims. So one finds chiefdoms, mayor's offices, state services, NGOs and herders associations all involved in the sector. But only a few of the COFOs perform well. This original

and ambitious formula seems to have a real impact only when two conditions are satisfied: (1) the presence of a permanent (paid) secretary who is competent, and (2) the support of a project providing operational inputs (logistics, transport, etc.). This is the reason the COFODEP (Departmental Land Commission) of Guidan Rounji seems to work well.

The role of district chiefs in coordination needs also to be recognised. On the one hand, the chieftaincy is no longer an institution which is in a position to deliver goods in an autonomous fashion; it is not even a central actor in the various configurations. But on the other hand, it can play an important role in respect of coordination or linkage, using its negative or veto power. Without the agreement of the chief, or at least a minimum engagement on his part, a collective action can be strongly handicapped. The capacity of the chiefs to take any initiatives is in practice strongly affected by their personal qualities and backgrounds. Many chiefs are former senior officials. They have important networks within the higher levels of the public service, and they have many of 'their men' sitting in the municipal councils. These facts reinforce their strategic position as individuals in relation to problems of coordination.

Finally, the findings undermine any concept implying an opposition between the formal and the informal. Coordination involves formal as much as informal actors (e.g. the *gendarmérie*, the prefect, private security guards, *yambanga*, mayors and the chief's horsemen, all contribute to security). Moreover, the formal actors themselves often operate in an informal manner (e.g. the FNIS escorting trucks on their own account). Finally, the informal actors are often in the process of seeking formal recognition (the case of the *yambanga*) (Lund 2009).

4.2 The decisive role of local reforming leaders

Improvement in the delivery of goods involves a form of charisma (in the Weberian sense), given that personal relationships are central to the various processes of informal coordination to which we have drawn attention. But this observation, which may seem banal raises two important questions: How can the action of a reformer become 'routinised' so that it outlives the particular individual? Under what conditions are reformers able to emerge?

The first question poses the problem of *local reformist alliances*. The actions undertaken by an isolated reformer never survive his departure. Routinisation implies in all cases the adoption of the reform measures by a significant collectivity of concerned actors (in practice by certain active members of the delivery configuration). A reformer needs to transform the prevailing practical norms (e.g. by modifying certain aspects of the working cultures of state services or municipal councils).

The second question poses the problem of the relation between 'reform contexts' and the presence of 'reformers'. Thus, certain public policies (generally co-produced by the state and donors) can create 'windows of opportunity' which certain local actors, for example the COFOs, can seize upon with a view to improving the delivery of a good. This is connected to the next variable.

4.3 A local strategic utilisation of the DPs

Quite often, the presence of the DPs (which is a long-term affair, not the 'temporary support to take-off' which it claims to be) provides 'reform contexts' and 'windows of opportunity'. The capacity of local leaders to mobilise the DPs to address critical bottlenecks (or to 'manipulate' projects to serve local development objectives) should therefore be considered carefully. The customary tendency is to set up an opposition between the *endogenous* (local and informal) and the *exogenous* (development projects) so that donor interventions are seen only in terms of the imposition of norms from outside, badly adapted to local contexts. In fact we found that a public policy, even if it is initiated by an external donor, always gets partly appropriated – as it is implemented – into the strategies, logics and games of local actors. In turn, these processes can allow a local reforming actor to transform a new general public policy into a micro-reform according to his own agenda and adapted to the local practical norms.

4.4 Informal privatisation

Privatisation can sustain the provision of a service, albeit on commercial terms, when the state is no longer able to meet its obligations, for example through collecting contributions to pay for the fuel and per diems of the *gendarmes*, or paying private guards. In such cases, informal privatisation is linked with a certain form of formal privatisation, as with cost-recovery in

health; the state pays the salaries of the health personnel, and the users pay for the medicines. In effect, this produces a system of state-user co-financing, or semi-privatisation, of health.

There also exists another form of informal privatisation, where the user finances are not just part of the delivery of the service instead of the state, but also a premium which accrues directly to the official in question. The latter, paid by the state to deliver a service, only does so if he is also paid by the user. This is one of the 'elementary forms of corruption' (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006). The problem is that these two types of informal privatisation are often mixed together. When a trader pays the *gendarmes* to escort his lorry, he is co-financing the delivery of a public service, but he also provides a 'bonus' to the *gendarme*.

State-user co-financing of public services (in the form of either formal or informal semi-privatisation) poses, nevertheless, the intractable problem of access for the poorest: in the absence of any stable institutional support to the most deprived, are there any systems of social solidarity (based on family, patronage or charity) which permit the latter to get free access to goods that are only being provided for cash?

4.5 The system of contributions

This is an equally common and indeed generalised form of state-user co-financing. It can arise from informal privatisation, but it can also be a form of direct delivery of a service outside the state. Instead of payment by the individual at the point of delivery, the contributions are collected and managed by intermediary actors. These *ad hoc* charges affecting users or the actors involved in the service provision are generally voluntary. It is a simple, effective system which expresses well the general-interest character of the good in question. The initiative can come from several types of actors: the chiefs (in the case of the contributions by villages to pay for the *gendarmes* to deal with the devastating annual transhumance of the Oudah Fulani), the big traders (for market cleaning) or the mayor's office (for payment of the garbage carters).

Contributions are also called for to meet project conditionalities. When projects intend to make some local investment they often require a

minimum financial contribution from the population, known as the 'social counterpart' or 'quota'. For projects, this contribution is supposed to guarantee 'participation' by the population and to provide evidence of their interest in the investment in question. But sometimes, a single actor makes this contribution on behalf of the population, paying the whole amount himself; this may be a patron-sponsor (*mécène*), but can also be the municipality.

The system of contributions has some limits: the excessive resort to contributions (in contexts of general poverty) engenders a progressive loss of motivation, and the management of the funds from contributions arouses permanent suspicions of misappropriation on the part of the population.

4.6 The organisation of work and the management of human resources

The state, the *communes* and the associations are the three modes of local governance officially charged with the delivery of collective goods, but they all suffer from extreme problems of work organisation and human resource management. The lack of appropriate strategies, policies, team-working and competencies leaves these organisations in the grip of innumerable forms of improvisation, inconsistency, double-speak and clientelism, the latter being their main form of regulation. The available official management methods tend to be 'kits' imported from the outside, from the colonial discipline of the *chicotte* (stick), recycled with various borrowings by the 'authoritarian' and military regimes, through classic European bureaucratic proceduralism, to the instruments of New Public Management. These systems have never been grafted successfully onto local administrative, municipal or associational structures, their routines and their practical norms.

What is remarkable about the local corporate organisations (transport unions, butchers or cattle brokers' local associations) is that, by contrast, they have partly resolved this problem. We are exploring this further.

4.7 Collective mobilisations

One of the principal successes of the military regime of Kountché, which elicits the strongest nostalgia, was the rehabilitation, extension, coordination and structuring of the *samaria*, youth groups organised by the authorities in a

huge neo-traditional federation with a presence in all villages and very active in community and cultural affairs. This was the regime's mass membership organisation. The military dictatorship did not rely just on a vertical discipline based largely on fear. It also had the capacity to organise popular mobilisation on an everyday basis, something that the political parties have not been able to recreate. *Samaria* involved the majority of young people and generated a certain degree of enthusiasm around activities including theatrical festivals, social and sports events, reception of visitors, dancing and singing competitions between villages, but also cleaning days (collective street sweeping) and collective village works. The coming of democracy brought all this to a spontaneous end.

5 Conclusion

Two general bottlenecks, common to the local delivery of the four public goods considered, need to be addressed. Up to now, they have been virtually ignored by public policies and by DPs. One is the coordination problem, the other one is the accountability issue.

We have already highlighted the coordination problem. The absence of any higher level, formal and legitimate framework, capable of coordinating the different actors and institutions concerned, leaves room for personal arrangements, short-lived alliances, fragile policies of friendship, and informal privatisation. *Communes* seem to be the only official institution designed for this task. But are they in a position to impose or negotiate such a framework? The answer today is 'no'. What about tomorrow?

The accountability issue is even more complex. Citizens/users make judgements about the quality of the services provided, make demands, express their expectations and sometimes mobilise around them. They exercise voice. But who listens? One of the many problems encountered is that most of the different actors who are involved in the *de facto* co-delivery of the public goods are *not* accountable to the citizens/users. As we have seen, they come under different particular accountabilities corresponding to each institution. The outstanding issue is, therefore, under what circumstances can a sense of *generalised* accountability towards users emerge, cutting across particular accountabilities, and based on a form of shared civic consciousness among providers?

Note

- 1 The researchers were: A. Diarra, Y. Issa, A. Aghali, A. Oumarou, H. Moussa.

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