

## **The Reproduction of State Agricultural Bureaucratic Culture in Benin**

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One can identify five interlinked categories of institutions or actors at the heart of state agricultural bureaucracy in Benin, that are difficult to differentiate when in action: the state, the staff of state and non-state intervention agencies, the funding agencies, the rural producers, and the market consumers. In their daily production of the discourse and practice of rural development, the actors do not lend themselves to any linear model whereby the state elaborates the policy, and the staff of the intervention agencies implements it among rural producers, with the financial and technical assistance of funding agencies.

This paper discusses one particular of these categories of actors, the staff of the intervening agencies, using two main sources of data: first are anthropological investigations conducted in the early nineties, at the start of the neo-liberal reforms of dismantling state apparatus. Second are data drawn from participant observation of interactions since the early 2000s between NGOs staff and consultants on the one hand and the state service staff on the other in the context of the so-called 'faire-faire' mode of operation. Some of the actors presented in this paper have been traced through over 20 years of profession. I explore the background of their unthematized assumptions, their expectations and individual know-how, their lifeworlds and life trajectories. My argument is that the bureaucratic culture at work in the agricultural sector is deep rooted in its foundation and survived the various reforms the sector underwent ever since. Indeed, what is rationalised by various actors as agricultural development policy results from a consensus built out of non-dialogical social interactions. The personal interests (for power, career, material resources, coping with family pressure, life projects etc.) become entangled with technical arguments, which together shape the everyday reality of policy discourse and practice. In most circumstances, the actual delivery of mandatory service to clients depends more on the structure and circumstances of interaction with these clients, rather than the actual human and material assets of the service.