Negotiating development at glocalised knowledge interfaces[i]

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Abstract

The paper takes up recent global debates within what can be called a social and cultural turn of development policy, by looking at interfaces and interconnectedness between different sites and spaces of knowledge production on development. It is assumed that these interfaces are on the one hand perpetuating, partly mystifying local knowledge and institutions, and on the other hand not producing appropriate methodologies and reflective spaces for validation. These different sites are international development agencies and donors as well as conferences and planning procedures, national and regional social science production on development, consultancy and so called NGOs; all of them considered to be suppliers of methodologically appropriate, socially legitimate and culturally valid local knowledge. Looking at new forms of social cohesion and collective agency of society, social movements (such as peasant and women organisations) and civil society organisations, without questioning implicit concepts of formal or informal economy, social sectors, modern as against traditional governance seems methodologically unsound. In this paper, I seek to re-connect social analysis with new approaches of modernity taking multiple and diversely oriented approaches to development studies.

Keywords: development; knowledge production; knowledge communities; modernity

Introduction

Development knowledge on and for Africa has been globalised at a very early stage in the international development community. Questions of transfer, of sustainability of transformation (or the lack of it) are problems as acute as ever. Local development failures, currently expressed in overarching discourses on poverty reduction need to be challenged by the social sciences. The paper takes up recent global debates within what can be called a social and cultural turn of development policy, by looking at interfaces and interconnectedness between different sites and spaces of knowledge production on development. It is assumed that these interfaces are on the one hand perpetuating, partly mystifying local knowledge and institutions, and on the other hand not producing appropriate methodologies and reflective spaces for validation. These different sites are international development agencies and donors as well as conferences and planning procedures, national and regional social science production on development, consultancy and so called NGOs; all of them considered to be suppliers of methodologically appropriate, socially legitimate and culturally valid local knowledge. Looking at new forms of social cohesion and collective agency of society, social movements (such as peasant and women organisations) and civil society organisations, without questioning implicit concepts of formal or informal economy, social sectors, modern as against traditional governance seems methodologically

unsound. In this paper, I seek to re-connect social analysis with new approaches of modernity taking multiple and diversely oriented approaches to development studies.

The main focus will be to look at global concepts which are crosscutting these divisions such as livelihoods, social security, food security, participation, decentralisation, saving and credit organisations etc. and challenge the new global turn of establishing 'institutions for sustainable development' (World Development Report 2003) which are supposed to 'coordinate human behaviour'. The paper suggests deconstructing this new approach of institutional economics by resorting to an analysis of the embeddedness of new institutional arrangements constructed as being traditional or culturally acceptable. Thereby, locally relevant global development concepts will be taken up, following the assumption that the knowledge produced neglects the interaction and creative new interpretation and arrangements of local institutions. I am thinking of forms of market integration and local trade meant to overcome the livelihood/income divide, of management of natural resources and new arrangements of collective and communal conventions for resource management, mutual aid and saving institutions, food security institutions etc. The assumption is that new forms of translocal and gendered arrangements of social and cultural embeddedness are made even less visible in contexts of decentralisation or post-conflict institution building. Examples will be taken from my own research, such as the rehabilitation of rice fields and management of other economic resources through women's organisations and natural resource management conventions crosscutting administrative institutions, and also in Senegal, where new fora and spaces for public debate glocalising development knowledge by transnational peasant and women networks across African countries are present. Suggestions for complex and dense methodological approaches are made, bearing in mind the assumption that there is an important field of interest for social development research in Africa within the perspectives of a sociology of knowledge, looking at translocal sites of knowledge production.

Knowledge communities and sites of social and development knowledge production and their interfaces

Development knowledge on and in Africa (Lachenmann 2006b) – contrary to what is often believed to be a marginalisation of Africa - has been globalised at a very early stage of recent globalisation processes. Sites of production and negotiation of this knowledge constitute spaces and interfaces between the global and the local (Long 2000) in the sense of localising knowledge). These glocalised arenas give raise to new conceptualisations and empirical research on hybridisation and negotiation. On one hand, these new arena (including so-called participatory studies, internet and knowledge management) seem to validate knowledge production with regard to social reality and therefore make it relevant to practice. On the other hand, an inflation of consultancy work is taking place whose methodological validity is not challenged in a public scientific arena. At the same time, there is few (empirically grounded) scientific research on issues related to development in a broader sense (i.e. in the sense of socio-economic transformation, not directly linked to co-operation, such as evaluations) which might constitute this necessary public sphere of critical knowledge on society.

Another aspect of development knowledge is that the 'social and cultural turn' of development policies and co-operation (with reference to the sometimes challenged notion of applied social sciences) has led to its own definitions of social science concepts (recently e.g. 'civil society', 'social capital' etc.) and very often 'the civil society', 'NGOs' are considered as scientifically (and socially) legitimised carriers of this social science knowledge, be it in the framework of participation or consultancy. Although it is typical for spheres of (critical) social science, activism in social movements, and certain policy conceptualisations to overlap, this seems to weaken the scientific independency and quality of knowledge production and at the same time devalue social knowledge as being of lower status than other expert knowledge. We should look at these different spheres, communities in the sense of epistemic communities, in order to analyse the forms of knowledge production, the channels and

forms of validation, social organisation, personal trajectories between these communities, forms of finance, public versus private ownership, autonomy of organisation etc. Instead of perpetuating the dichotomy between local expertise and global knowledge it seems more appropriate to look at African societies as part of a global 'knowledge society'. Development policy is requested to take cultural diversity into consideration, especially when participatory development, research, and planning methods are being proclaimed. Methodological considerations about the validity and contextualisation of the data as well as about the social and cultural embeddedness of policies are in order. However, we have to reflect on the implications and possible pitfalls of too many ready-made demands for participation, authenticity and consideration of local knowledge and 'voices' of actors and 'target groups' respectively as beneficiaries of development policy, such as the 'poor' and 'women'. The danger of essentialism and technocracy looms very high (Shiva 1994). Also the critical reflections on populism in development research and planning (Olivier de Sardan 1990) continue to be very relevant.

As the sociology of knowledge shows (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Luckmann 1995), knowledge and agency are intimately linked, thereby leading to the social construction of reality through practice. Agency comes through knowledgeable actors (Giddens 1995), whose everyday as well as special knowledge has to be looked at from the actors' life-world perspective. Knowledge is produced in different areas and spaces and is differentially distributed in society. 'Encounters at the interface' (Long 1992) of different knowledge systems can be studied through an analysis of different logics of agency, social worlds, codes, and negotiations. Power relations come into the fore as one observes their empirical implications. Knowledge systems cannot be seen as closed units as knowledge is always produced in interactive processes and therefore hybridised, in arenas whose boundaries are permanently shifting and becoming translocal. Development knowledge is glocalised *par excellence* as a debate on gender can illustrate. Many projects revolving women and the importation of technology to food processing or the upgrading of the quality of tra-

ditional art and craft failed because no serious attempts were being made at integrating global environmental knowledge into the local modernisation process. This observation could apply to all fields of knowledge as they all are socially structured.

The main issue seems now to be to look at these processes, spaces, trajectories, and negotiation of knowledge. With new forms and technologies of communication, the boundaries of these spaces become fluid and new arenas are formed. Studying the interaction between different knowledge systems is in contrast to dualistic positions with regard to requests for the transfer of 'modern' knowledge on the one hand and a profound critique of cultural imperialism and inappropriate knowledge, which is (sometimes) combined with a mystification of 'traditional' knowledge, on the other hand. Interfaces of social spaces and of knowledge systems are useful concepts to guide empirical research on which to ground theoretical considerations (Long, 1992) by studying 'encounters at the interface' and 'battlefields of knowledge'. This approach implies an 'actor-oriented approach for the analysis of social change and development intervention' (Long 1992, p. ix), exposing 'the socially constructed and continuously negotiated nature of intervention processes' (1992, p. i), 'provide accounts of the life-worlds, strategies, and rationalities of actors in different social arenas' (1992, p.4). This includes considering relative positions of power in the social arena while looking at the vertical coherence and contextualisation of interfaces as well as of flows.

Epistemic communities, public sphere and bureaucratic knowledge management

One of the main problems in the application of development knowledge is that expert assessments in general do not refer to the stock of knowledge accumulated on and in Africa, neither on the evolution of a certain field or sector, nor on the societal context in which knowledge is to be applied. At the interface between general social research and expert studies meant to be 'baseline studies' of social structure and the problems which the respective development

intervention is supposed to address lies a big gap. This leaves a basic question open: how can the social and cultural embeddedness of policies be addressed?

Mkandawire (1998) talks about an erosion in legitimacy of African academic knowledge. There is a widening gap between scientific research and studies following standardised methods of surveys and participatory methods, without even questioning their adequacy to the subject. Thus, a stock of knowledge is created in a development world, with knowledge being each and every time newly produced or reproduced within the same epistemic community. Its distance from academic standards grows, its self-consciousness of methodology dwindles, with the exception of a few innovative translocal institutions. National researchers and consultants find themselves in a problematic position regarding their epistemic community. Most of the time, they are only asked to write short papers and produce knowledge that seems very often not grounded in everyday practice but tends to formulate modernistic normative requirements according to localised development jargon ('grassroots'). Apart from the above mentioned approaches, they are hardly doing any qualitative research in a methodologically systematised design that would have to be embedded and contextualised. Many circumstances presented as 'self understood' for 'informed' local actors are not systematically taken into account in policy formulation, including historical circumstances, experiences and social memory etc.

Some new approaches are what Mkandawire (1998) calls 'contract research': while considering this a neo-colonial practice, researchers feel forced to comply for the sake of international and academic recognition. Here, universities compete and, overburdened with teaching, seldom foster links between research, foreign sponsored research institutes and consultancy. A most important problem seems to be the existence of a critical public sphere – constituted by different knowledge arenas – into which knowledge from independent research, activist positions of civil society/NGOs and expert and development knowledge and policy results are debated together with political actors and media. Little research done by national researchers seems to be fed into public debate. This mis-

perception of cultural and social realities and their changing structures during socio-economic and political transformation, certainly hinders learning processes at all levels of society and especially in development policy circles. The lack of access to data and research means is stated, and especially by national researchers and consultants, but documents are not fed into a general platform. The question is whether development knowledge, results of evaluations, concepts and methods are becoming public knowledge. While in the past the State was seen as a bureaucratic storage of privileged knowledge, knowledge is increasingly becoming privatised. The inaccessibility of development knowledge even when it goes about planning and participation, makes the necessary critical debate impossible. Internationally provided mainstream expert knowledge prevails on local knowledge and social reality as information about one's own society is barely accessible. As an example, the participation offered by donors for elaborating certain policies (e.g. agenda 21; poverty alleviation e.g. Sénégal 2002) is top down, so that the dominant discourse is adhered to, often through consultants, while no learning from real world experience is possible. One could argue that fora are provided through NGOs, social movements among others, and here questions arise about the validity and the social and political legitimacy of the knowledge produced. NGOs (or participatory consultants) do not usually bring in a critical (social or interdisciplinary) research community. International agencies' efforts to promote knowledge exchange for NGOs are certainly interesting, but do they take account of those that have been organised at the grassroots level, without caring for official recognition (e.g. for women's organisations on violence and peace in Sudan, Nageeb 2006)? Statements and comments by so-called civil society organisations, whose research quality or social legitimacy are taken for granted by development agencies as 'needs', i.e. images of social reality. This is a fundamental methodological and populist misunderstanding. The position of NGOs is often considered to be one of the suppliers of social information and societal legitimacy. This is a problem as science, its application in policy, civil society and activism should still be

separated according to their respective justification of knowledge. NGOs tend to work in a very populist sense, taking over 'codes' of writing proposals according to what they consider the mainstream development knowledge, they are neither automatically scientifically nor policy-wise experts with regard to the studies being undertaken. However, their analysis e.g. of poverty and its solutions are mostly very conventional and poor in all knowledge aspects (the same applies often to consultancy based papers such as National Strategy for Gender Equality and Equity in Senegal, Sénégal 2005).

Finally, a word should be said about the knowledge produced within the context of consultancy, a contested intermediate space between research and policy. There is very little learning through policy advice to government institutions by national (social) science. The consultancy arrangements in development co-operation do not render knowledge transparent. Little use can be made of studies by consultancy, as results are not contextualised and validated according to standards in the community of knowledge. E.g. there can be 'stakeholder analysis' by enumeration of different actors, but nothing about local power structures of patron-client systems, historicity of concepts of resource management etc. The regime of knowledge produced through consultancy prevents learning and the application of knowledge in order to challenge practices. Consultancy reports are treated as property of the institutions, not subject to public debate, not even amongst researchers while this would be the only way to validate their knowledge.

Participation, gender and knowledge as crosscutting development concepts, interfaces of (gendered) translocal social spaces

Along participation (through which one assumes to be able to collect local knowledge), empowerment has become key to development discourses aiming at making use, negotiating and developing (local) knowledge. Does this now mean that 'grassroots' are to also 'participate fully' in information or knowledge society? What are the limitations of taking for granted

any needs and demands articulated in any participatory setting? Do they have a different knowledge, an especially useful one? 'The views of the poor were incorporated through open consultations in public village meetings' (World Bank 1999: 13). Participatory workshops are idealised to capture the 'voices' of the villagers regarding the structure of their society - for example who is poor and who is rich - without validating and contextualising knowledge production. The gendered structure of knowledge has been rendered invisible and neglected, and so have translocal 'informal' social relations. The problem is not that tradition is 're-invented' – as seems to be the case in the social and cultural turn of development – but that overlapping concepts of institutions, entitlements, their historicity etc. are not taken into account while they still inform the local world view and agency. Mostly a supposedly historical and cultural analysis of 'traditions' is done but nothing is said about the perpetuation of their (tacit) meaning. There is a trend to co-operate with 'traditional' or local 'communities', without looking at the processes of construction of these communities. Tradition and culture are permanently re-interpreted, re-invented and their meaning is negotiated; they have to be embedded within their structural and situational contexts. Especially women and their supposedly traditional knowledge are instrumentalised in identity building processes of ethnic or even so called autochtonous (Geschiere, Meyer 1999) groups. The main question is: how do people structure, interpret, handle their own world and cope with problems as defined and perceived by themselves?

Knowledge is negotiated in multiple spaces, with networks creating translocal and transnational arenas. However, hegemonic centres produce uniform knowledge platforms and capture cosmopolitan consultants, activists and academics. Instead of an approach with actors or stakeholders and their supposed particular knowledge, we have agency, spaces etc. created by movements and (epistemic) communities. Instead of the socio-technocratic application of mechanistic participatory methods, or vulnerability discourse on local needs, we look at the hegemonic interpretations and negotiations. The concept of knowledge and information society is being constituted by glocal processes,

trying to understand the social (gendered) structure as well as agency. In many organisations, learning processes from their own activities are not possible, as no feedback or critique is admitted. It is not just a matter of management and diffusion. There is no reflexivity and flexibility with authoritarian modes of bureaucratic functioning that still prevail; organisational structures discourage and hinder creativity. Current debates of knowledge management do not take into account the different frameworks and frames of reference and translations between different arenas. The problem of knowledge artefacts (e.g. blueprints, surveys) (Hyden 1989) seems to be revitalised in decentralisation. There is unproductive interdependency between bureaucracy as providing formal knowledge and the national consultancy (Mkandawire 1998).

The power of definition is very decisive in the context of hegemonic knowledge. Concepts of economy, formal and informal sector,[1] and household are not corresponding to social reality. An example is polygynous gender relations and households, which are not taken into account in social security and social benefits, agricultural extension and credit systems amongst others. Regarding the use of knowledge on women and by women it has been pointed out (Goetz 1994) that on the one hand 'systems of ignorance' (Hobart 1993; Lachenmann 1996) are constructed by always maintaining that nothing or not enough is known about the situation of women, effects or impact of globalisation etc. On the other hand, the introduction of gendered information and monitoring systems or accounts keeps statisticians busy, with the so-called gender approach pretending that women are always 'included', but without applying gender as a societal, structural concept.

Negotiating decentralisation at the interface

In democratisation processes on the one hand, and decentralisation on the other, relevant information is not shared, nor procedures made transparent. Rather, regulations are more and more mystified and complicated, so that, for instance, in local communities, al-though counsellors have been elected, members feel increasingly helpless and dependent on information and interpretation of rules from above. Senegal illustrates the case in point, as it becomes clear that processes involving state bureaucracy and the ruling party take precedence over local autonomy and initiatives, preventing creative learning processes. By the same token, the successes, although certainly not always sustainable, of several decades of activities of the peasant movement, including women's groups, are not built on and their experiences and knowledge tends to be marginalised instead of being developed. Referring to my own fieldwork in Senegal, Cameroon, and Mali, it seems that the concept of decentralisation is being challenged in the local rural arena at the interface of knowledge systems (Lachenmann 2004a; Lachenmann 2006; Lachenmann et al. 1995, 1999, 2006). Applying an agency and gender perspective, it appears that decentralisation is conceived by various types of local and especially female actors – including the elected rural councillors – as access to development information from which they are again excluded and therefore obliged to renegotiate. Their conceptions and experiences of sustainable development including social and food security as well as the securing of natural resources are devalued and not made use of in newly designed blueprints of local development plans which are said to be elaborated by participatory procedures. These are falling back with regard to former experiences of integrating livelihoods and technical innovation of cash crop production, protecting natural resources within a broad conception of local economy, in favour of an outdated public policy approach of infrastructural planning. Thereby economic subsistence and market activities are being pushed aside which had been integrated at least to some degree by self-help projects and movements pursued within a kind of solidarity co-operation of external NGOs, as well as a networking and institutionalising self-help movement generated in the Sahel and West Africa region after the Sahelian droughts (Lachenmann 1994).

It can be argued that good governance through interaction with other levels is jeopardised in this way

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by raising the issue of vertical coherence and looking at concepts of participation and local management of natural resources, as well as by the risk of being monopolised by technocratic authority. Concepts such as social forestry make one wonder about which community is being constructed when it goes about the devolution of power, while hiding and reinforcing external interests and patron-client relations towards higher levels of society. This type of devolution of planning power might lead on the one hand to turning NGOs into simple service providers, and on the other to constructing local communities as ignorant, and to the disappearing of public spaces. The challenge is to bring central and local logics of agency together by creating spaces and arena for negotiation and change, instead of formalistic participation. As one of the main challenges of decentralisation is the problem of transferring monolithic solutions, good governance through decentralisation has to show that it is really making diversity and pluralism possible, and not bureaucratising development down to the grassroots level.

From an agency perspective, decentralisation can be seen (see different approaches such as Bako-Arifari, Laurent eds. 1996, Bierschenk, Olivier de Sardan eds. 1998, Klute 1999) to provide space for participation, local autonomy, democratic change (see Nzomo 1995) and social justice. Civil society is not to be perceived as a conglomerate of representatives of organisations, but as a space strengthening public debate and creating multilevel arena interacting with the state and contributing to social cohesion. The political system, state administration and regulations are studied as interacting with civil society in different arenas.

Within the framework of the ongoing transformation processes (Lachenmann 2000) there are newly emerging gender differentiated forms of interaction (interfaces) with regard to decentralisation, all forms of associations (including peasant organizations and NGOs) and democratisation. There are changes of social, especially women's spaces, i.e. of the public sphere and the private, as well as new forms of organisation on the local level, especially by women, and their translocal networking bridging various levels (see

Nageeb 2004 on Sudan). Empirical research provides us with a rather ambivalent picture, according to which newly established female modes of organisation and 'traditional' forms of political/societal representation are hampered through the ongoing formalisation of local power structures. The limited democratisation efforts with regard to multiparty systems and formal decentralisation and local administration tend to exclude women. The institutionalisation of decentralisation hardly provide the necessary fora for negotiation of the relevant social knowledge. Technical and technocratic knowledge tend to be marginalised, and policy issues on different levels lack vertical coherence.

It seems important to pursue an institutional, and gendered approach of social organisation. This means introducing an intermediate level of analysis between micro and macro which would be necessary to better understand issues of decentralisation in the sense of devolution of competence and resources, as well as of democratisation, and of problems of development and development co-operation wanting to get to grips with new concepts of State functions, citizenship etc. Gender relations are, indeed, crosscutting these relations. Often, access to land and to natural resources passes through relations of marriage and alliance which are translocal. New forms of participation introduced by the State with support or pressure of the international donor community often do not take into account the old parallel power structures of representation, ignoring mechanisms which link female worlds and spaces with general power structures. Many other translocal relations are not taken into account either, e.g. those constituted through migration processes and social movements taking place in a translocal space but influencing local policies, or those relations linking big men to their economic privileges. It becomes clear that often women and their activities have been representing the local (knowledge) and rural (grassroots) which therefore has been conceived in a very narrow sense. One might fear, however that knowledge and practice of social movements and the associative sector, in particular women, becomes marginalised as soon as it gains attention in the process

of decentralisation. Women's associations are always less formal (see Sieveking 2007) and they contribute a lot to local infrastructure and communal caring economy through self-help/voluntary work as well as collecting monetary and material resources on the local level. Decentralisation of power will also mean more formalisation of local tax and fee collection and less power for informal associations to influence the way local resources are used. Knowledge and practices of female actors who have in recent years to some extent created new arena and spaces for expression and transformation, might disappear once more. The question is whether the silent disempowerment of women which had been brought about by modernistic development projects and policies and sometimes turned around through gender policies, continues under decentralisation. Are women getting more fundamentally excluded as development policy moves to these new concepts meant to be more political and social?

Experience shows that while it might be interesting for women not to be too much put into a straight jacket of male, communal and state control, it is a fact that groups or co-operatives with mainly male members tend to be formal(ised), whereas women's groups tend to be informal(ised). In Senegal e.g. men are mainly members in economic groups - GIE *groupement à intérêt économique*, women in Women in Development groups – GPF *groupement de promotion féminine*. The latter are captured by old experiences and culture of community development and home economics through established channels depending on Social Ministries subject to losing support after a change of government.

Many local NGOs are patronising in their 'participatory' approach through which a lot of external finance passes. The fatal outcome is that everywhere we have local credit systems, mostly to do small trade considered ideal for women to earn some additional income but their formalisation through the strengthening of the local arena is very slow. At the same time, women are not encouraged, or even excluded from activities involving new modes of access to, and management of natural resources, increase of agricultural productivity and new economic opportunities (such

as upgrading of transformation of agricultural products etc.) in the local economy. This is even the case in fields of activities where women are normally active, often within a complex structure of gender co-operation and exchange (see e.g. Batana 2007 about 'buyam-sellam' women in Cameroon). And this is also the case for their social and political activities. A case in point is the example of three 'women presidents' studied in 2004 (by Franklin C. Odoemenam, see Lachenmann 2006a, Lachenmann et al. 2006) in a rural community in Senegal within the framework of rehabilitation and expansion of rice schemes which, according to the gender order, are being worked on by women (now also admitting young men), thereby enhancing food security by taking away pressure on rain-fed cereal production by men. Each of them was considering herself to legitimately represent 'the women' whereas one was co-operating with her group with the programme of bilateral technical co-operation, the other with a NGO and the third one with State services of women's promotion. In this context, the management of these collective economic resources seemed not to be included in the local administration and development planning. It becomes clear these women groups are not politically represented in the local council in order to recognise regulations agreed upon. The question remains - how can women's movements and women's groups enter into serious debate about transformation in the framework of decentralisation?

Constituting social cohesion and security

Since structural adjustment programmes (SAP) have been implemented, we have observed that community resources and especially women's resources, are being siphoned off by formalisation of social security, cost recovery etc. Fund raising has taken place on the local level, in traditional and neo-traditional forms. As women used to collect this money and do the so-called voluntary or self-help work for providing basic services, the cost recovery as well as the formalisation of basic services provision through local government becomes problematic. Questions of subsidisation be-

tween levels of service provision seem not to be discussed. On the contrary, in Senegal, in 2004, I observed how a rural community was taught how to make a health centre viable by increasing fees without even discussing problems of access. Local development funds established by bilateral donors at the local level are not transparent as to their integration into the local budget and status of amortisation.

Livelihoods are constructed through systems of social, gendered, relations (Lachenmann 1992, 1997, 2000). Social security is constituted through flexible systems of gifts and distribution, often uphold with a lot of effort by women. The local economy is characterised by a 'subsistence logic', with women making a priority of livelihoods according to a perspective that combines household energy, water, sensitivity towards sustainable use of natural resources, such as collecting wood and other gathering products. These resources are now subject to new regulations at the decentralised level and a certain blockade as to bringing them from the social to the public level takes place.

The associative sector has proven itself to be the most relevant actor for achieving social cohesion through institutionalising concepts of self-help, food security, social security etc. within a de-territorialised, translocal space which is also structured through gender relations. Social and gender differences become more and more evident with, e.g., certain women acting as development brokers (Bierschenk, Olivier de Sardan eds. 2000). Women often are very innovative in finding new forms of interaction with the local authorities and administration (e.g. different types of self-help forms of waste management in Mali); the general problem of voluntary work and self-help versus professionalisation and access to knowledge, is, however, in the hands of men and will be exacerbated by decentralisation. Food security, at the junction of political and economic fields, includes social entitlements. How can socio-economic transformation be enhanced through actors of civil society if a meaningful co-operation is to take place within decentralisation? Caring or community economy and services as a gendered structure, very often organised through social movements and groups, antagonise new bureaucratic forms of resource mobilisation and budgeting

in the frame of decentralisation.

The case of Senegal illustrates this point. After the near to break down of technical services provided by national Ministries, so-called self-help groups and development committees had installed a kind of local administration in many places, taking care, e.g. of water supply etc. With regard to gender policies, local and regional technical services, such as agricultural extension, have never been functional as they reduced women to community development, animation etc. (see Padmanabhan 2002 on Ghana). The State seems to have re-enforced its hold on the population and increased its legitimacy by resorting to the technocratic concept of WID (Women in Development), at a time when decentralisation has formalised and homogenised the women's movements, paradoxically reducing the pluralism and diversity that lay at the heart of the decentralisation policy. The development plans recently elaborated by Rural Councils are not coherent with those classically meant to be established by higher echelons of administration. In our study in 2004, we could observe a technocratic overtake, through local development workers whose function is not officially defined: trained by a donor supported programme in order to do surveys as well as funding applications, they acted as if doing personal consultancy.

The new decentralisation regulations and practices concern mainly land issues and are linked to natural resource management, as well as some infrastructure development, such as markets, including health and education. A critical issue of general importance, brought about by women's movements at the national level, is the question of property and inheritance of agricultural land by women. Collective access of women's groups to land and new economic opportunities often seem to be the solution and can be negotiated, but formal attribution seems not to take place. Very few women have been elected as councillors and, as a result, mainly men are trained by the natural resource management project we studied, or by other country wide projects called 'literacy for rural councillors'. In one Commune, four women counsellors (out of more than 30) were extremely bitter and considered men as hindering women to become politi-

cally involved. None of them was member of a 'hard core' commission, such as finance, environment, land etc. One of them was the former (first) President of the rural community (Commune Rurale, CR), coming from a noble family, one was an elderly woman from a village associated with her, one was the secretary of the Sous-Préfecture (administration), and one was 'representing' the young women (i.e. rather, following the old status concept). In another community a woman councillor stepped out when her brother was supposed to become a member. Some women councillors become vice presidents of health or finance commissions; in general they are seen as representing (only) women's issues (Lachenmann 2006a, Lachenmann et al. 2006; see also Diop 1995, Kaag 1999). The number of women who are knowledgeable about decentralisation and regionalisation modalities seems indeed very low. Therefore one can fear that women, who are so active in grassroots groups, can not continue to maintain their influence in present transformations as soon as the local regime is institutionalised, and they lose their spaces of public debate – constitutive elements of civil society.

Construction of community and closure

A typical case of constructing, top-down, a closed unit as 'community' is that of 'social forestry' introduced according to recent development concepts, in many forestry legislations (see Ngo Youmba-Batana 2007). According to its intrinsic logic, this approach conceives self management of forest resources through the population, contrary to State forests and reserves, including a share of revenues from the private sector. However, in most cases, authoritarian and predatory practices do not change. Contrary to trans-local social and economic realities, these participatory approaches construct an artificial locality to which this local management idea is linked. These approaches necessarily lead to economic and political frustrations as they dismiss institutionalised modes of interaction and do not take links with higher levels of power positions that cannot be addressed. In Rural Councils in Senegal, there is a differentiated power structure (see also

Blundo 1996) with, however, 'politique politicienne' becoming virulent with mainly women denouncing this, as they are less involved. The everyday work of the local government is often run by a clique of 'friends' of the president (Lachenmann et al. 2006), who either are the administrative secretary and his friends, but also who are selected amongst or given honorary positions of e.g. president of youth club etc. This has been especially observed in the case of a young president with quite some schooling, who, as he himself explained, became president by 'converting' to the new party in power.

Donors, and even translocal movements, tend to essentialise communities within the decentralisation framework. Social forestry in Cameroon, and other cases of neo-traditional institutions distributing/regulating access to economic resources such as community development and co-ordination units for natural resource management in Senegal (see local conventions and group management of rehabilitated rice fields) serve as illustrations. A neo-traditional community led by chiefs of different 'classes' (stipulated by the colonial regime) is being constructed in Cameroon through the introduction of social forestry with the assistance of foreign co-operation. Through its participatory or even populist and culturalist approach, 're-traditionalisation' might take place with the community being defined as the 'indigenous population'. Tradition is also resorted to when it goes about conflict resolution, with an interest in 'traditional conflict resolution mechanisms' regarding e.g. so-called immigrants or cattle holders. As a result, conflicts can be seen to increase. The question is, what concept of community is used, who belongs, who does not. How are gender specific forms of resource use represented, is there dependence on big men, do women depend on their lineage, their family of origin, their husband? Methodological rigour does not seem to be there at the order of the day: how are actors being defined, what idea of 'representatives of villages' is used, how are the local self-help groups defined, with whom the co-operation is planned are basic questions to be addressed. There is high danger that a pseudo-traditional structure is institutionalised and used for a new, modern type of regulation (i.e. land

rights based on community forestry), excluding women from decision making and from seriously taking part in new economic opportunities, although women groups are involved in certain tree planting efforts on individual (of family) or group (women's and farmers') farms. Thereby, so-called traditional, culture specific gender relations are perpetuated in new societal structures, political and economic opportunities. In this way, no opportunity is given to an autonomous social change which might include the negotiation of a new gender order with foreign donor assistance. The local is constructed in a mono-gendered but contradictory way. On the one side the community has a male connotation, on the other side, as has been mentioned, in policy contexts, women and their projects represent 'the local'. Small activities are for women, new economic opportunities of some importance are for men, with legitimacy being extorted from a reference to 'traditional' structures. The history of all kinds of land expropriation, collectivisation, establishment of groups, associations, co-operatives and their links and continuity with regard to decentralisation, privatisation, new forms of co-operatives, social forestry groups etc. are not taken into account. The question is how to refer to social memory, tradition and identity without bringing in old cleavages. There is a long background of authoritarian modes of governance and control of agricultural production. Autochthony starts to become a big problem (Geschiere, Meyer 1999), possibly enhanced by decentralisation and community approaches that exclude so called strangers from access to land, with struggles over historical land rights coming up. The question is 'to whom belongs the forest' (Ngo Youmba-Batana 2007 on Cameroon).

Bringing 'development' in through civil society at knowledge interfaces

In some countries it is officially required for local government to incorporate 'grass roots organisations' in deliberations and in service delivery. This means, with regard to social legitimacy, and mainly with regard to professional quality control, that there must be higher level organisational and associative structures in which actors on the local level are integrated (as referred to in the case of Senegal). Spaces for debate and negotiation are needed and should crosscut levels and be part and parcel of the public sphere but the local level is too low. Activists within the Senegalese peasant movement think that decentralisation leads to an undesirable politicisation, oriented towards group interests more than towards development. However, in our study (Lachenmann et al. 2006a) we saw that a former peasant leader, after becoming councillor and 'representing development' progressed and became vice-president of the Rural Community. This position seems indeed to provide him with some space for change.

A decisive problem to be addressed is how to attract attention to and create knowledge on local problems at the intermediary and national levels. Accused by the Senegalese peasant movement through the media in the context of 'famine in the villages' (summer 1998), the government reacted in a not very efficient way through the old authoritarian administrative structures of sous-préfet (at the district level). Food security is a crosscutting field where knowledge and concepts vary according to actors. Up to this date, even if addressing food shortage needs the most decentralised approach possible, overcoming central mismanagement, mis-information, mal-distribution, speculation etc., the state representative always relies on hegemonic knowledge. The peasant leaders' concept of food security goes against the official one, assuming that the imported rice on the markets at subsidised prices would still be unaffordable (cereal banks introduced by village groups having broken down in most cases). The food security paradigm seems to have been replaced by the poverty paradigm (see Sénégal 2002 for Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, also Schaefer 2002) and – as a cross-cutting issue – seems not to be addressed by Rural Councils, but regarded as NGO business, as are the cereal mills often run by women groups and decisive for subsistence work and caring economy, are regarded as belonging to the private sector.

The decentralisation processes could be expected to produce more information flows, including on processes of impoverishment. How could various

types of knowledge enter a larger debate concerning decentralisation (local development) as well as regional development (which hardly exists as a strategy) and poverty alleviation (Lachenmann 2003)? The local level – state relationship is regarded by the rural population as being mainly a matter of knowledge, of information about the different possibilities and services offered by the State and by international co-operation – means that communes are mainly seen as information agents as well as entering points to public resources, and not as loci for power regarding good governance, accountability, dialogue about development concepts etc. Decentralisation can therefore be regarded as a top-down transfer of hegemonic State information, and not as producing a space where the knowledge needed for agency is gathered. If knowledge was to be produced at the local level, it would integrate different logics: local knowledge as regards everyday practice, technical or situated knowledge, as well as (new) expert knowledge of a more generalised character. Within the framework of peasant organisations, through their leaders acting as brokers, the population had become quite knowledgeable in grasping these messages, but decentralisation will make this direct link more difficult to sustain.

Technical services, authorities and regional regimes do not seem to be undergoing a serious reform process in any West African country yet in order to be able to actively interact with the new local partners. Technical services have lost legitimacy but official rules of supervision, line etc. are not yet clear, i.e. there is no effective devolution of power. Legal pluralism, not to say inconsistency, is thriving, as there is hardly any knowledge about the new solutions and existing regulations. There seem to exist hardly any platforms, mechanisms or events to organise the necessary interaction between knowledge systems at different levels[2].

Decentralisation is currently being overemphasised as overall societal change and transformation, even poverty reduction, good governance and making development more political (see Kassimir 2002) have turned out too difficult to handle. Can the planning techniques and knowledge be decentralised so that communities can process their own development plans? I think this is unrealistic. In order to follow the

regulations of local government and have access to development resources, the communities need to possess expert or professional knowledge, on top of the specialised knowledge on legal and administrative regulations and procedures. No knowledge chain has been established with regard to technical knowledge from state agencies. Local communities do not have this knowledge. It is implied that they have to buy it (sic!) from private consultants or NGOs (who are said to be able to compete). With regard to the technical know-how, in the Senegalese case, it has become clear that the communal level is certainly overwhelmed and professional services are needed. One talks about 'partnership' with the State services, as well as contracts regarding financial contribution of rural communes. This would need to be institutionalised, given the fear that intermediary entities of co-ordination crosscutting the official structure of decentralisation and regionalisation might not be legalised by the higher levels of authority. Up to now it seems that the top-down financial flows do not yet occur and the dependence on donor money becomes higher and higher while informal mobilisation regarding resource management risks to be siphoned off to higher level formal systems e.g. of social security systems, water schemes etc..

This means processes of closure are taking place, causing a lack of visibility and control. Communes become closed systems, with individual actors able to influence the local arena. In assessing decentralisation, translocal relations need being considered, among which the role of migrants, NGO's, etc. Within the debate on sustainable development currently engaging civil society forces, there is a need for mediation at intermediary levels with a regulatory role pertaining to local councils. Peasant organisations, such as, in Senegal, the 'Comité de Concertation des Ruraux' (CNCR), have been involved in institutionalised forms introduced by multilateral cooperation within a rather complicated para-public system of counselling for 'producers' (ANCAR ed. 2004). As the organising capacity of peasants at the intermediary level has diminished in the wake of decentralisation, the outcome of such action is not clear yet. The enclosure going hand in hand with decentralisation will make

it more difficult to negotiate concepts of development, as NGOs will be more distant from grass-root needs and demands, and may well act as dubious representatives of local knowledge while transmitting codes and jargon, hindering any degree of autonomy. An illustration can be found in the fact that Malian communes are supposed to call on consultancy firms and NGOs in order to be able to handle the new 'catechism'. Local structures of power and authority may well lose their legitimacy based on local knowledge. New mechanisms of control also need to be installed, as well as new collective economic instruments and new forms of institutionalisation bringing together communes, associative sector, organisations and state services etc. possibly involving a drastic change in the logic of governance, as long as two-ways interactions are being fostered. Contrary to proclaimed intentions, the relevance of local knowledge might be reduced once again if standardised planning and monitoring methods overrule political and social consideration (see also Ferguson 1990). Only if the loose connectivity of social movements networking from their local anchorage can be maintained, dynamics and transformations might come about which had not been thought possible before.

Creating platforms for negotiation and exchange of knowledge

The relevance of vertical coherence becomes clear as to new instruments of cross-cutting governance introduced after the abandoning of the blue-print centralised planning approach, such as environmental action plans, poverty strategies, pastoral codes, food security, even women action plans. The way these were put together in many cases I observed had nothing to do with lower levels' realities. As an integral part of the decentralisation approach it would be necessary to foresee mechanisms and arena on or cross-cutting different levels. These levels would not necessarily have to be defined as bureaucratic, authoritarian ones.

At present, new forms of 'local conventions' or codes, 'fora of concertation' are being introduced e.g. in Senegal through development cooperation as in-termediary or transitory institutions beyond or cross-cutting the community level. However, these are very much struggling in order to be legally recognised by the upper administrative levels whose competence is not clear and thereby might be pushed into blockade. It is a decisive question whether these will be channels of clientelist interests, controlled by the authoritarian State, or whether there is a chance that they will indeed constitute fora in order to enlarge the room for manoeuvre at the interface of different levels. Regarding the problem of structuration and cohesion of society by different actors and institutions, the programme studied in Senegal does indeed provide a framework of concertation and/or fora for negotiation which are highly necessary for decentralisation efforts, but certainly deficient in empirical experiences. I think that the creation of these arena will be the decisive point where it will become clear whether state and civil society interaction, structuration and integration of society and a new relationship between state and population will be created.

What should be strengthened is the capacity to negotiate with regard to different groups within, as well as with the surrounding systems. Decentralisation is based on the concept of territoriality. Communities might be re-constructed as traditional and harmonious, in what can be called cultural and social closure. In times of de-territorialisation, trans-nationalism, global/local relations the focus in the form of approaches of place (Harcourt, Escobar 2002), locality, glocalisation could be helpful. Will there be a transfer of hegemonic knowledge top down and preclude new social spaces which had been constituted by social movements, providing space for change (Long 1992) and creativity and shaping power? Would new formalist democratic structures hinder the transformation of the authoritarian State? A two- way approach is certainly needed with a public sphere, multilayered, enabling critical debate and exchange of knowledge, including the professional and research community.

Global – local: glocalisation of knowledge – globalised knowledge arena

The general theme of knowledge societies and the growing importance of knowledge as a development resource and instrument of globalisation draw us to question the knowledge production, generation, social distribution (gendered), management and transfer (World Bank 1999) in a globalised knowledge arena. Translocal learning spaces call for consideration: (Lachenmann 2001) the Internet, of course, but also migration and other social networks, need to be acknowledged as spaces that produce new forms of localised knowledge and learning. Through the Internet, development agencies provide a vital access to knowledge, but a hegemony by national and transnational epistemic communities could isolate national and regional scientific communities. Some feminist debates question opportunities of access to interactive fora on the Internet (Harcourt 1999; Spiegel, Harig rapp. 2002). Does access to the Internet mean, knowledge is globalised, (re-)localised or, as one could say, glocalised? Results of the research project[3] 'Negotiating development in translocal gendered spaces in Muslim societies' with highly contrasting case studies (Sudan, Senegal, Malaysia) show a broad variety of global frames of reference meant for local consumption, women's rights being a case in point. The transformation in the understanding of relevant global concepts while travelling down and back up again to the global sphere needs to be carefully monitored. An important feature of knowledge developed by activists is supposed to be its crosscutting spheres of scientific research, political action and everyday life (Mueller 2005; Nageeb 2008, Sieveking 2008). In the course of the project, we studied the constitution of social spaces in which knowledge acquisition and production takes place, and evidenced an immense diversity within and amongst the countries at all levels. At the same time we could work out transversal typologies at institutional intermediary levels and constellations, as well as dimensions, discourses, and other relevant contexts.

Development taken as a form of knowledge production through negotiation in translocal spaces became central to the project. We argued that globalisation is construed through new social forms of organisation and epistemic communities, with female global networks being paramount in the development world as a global knowledge framework. We intended to produce empirically grounded (Strauss & Corbin 1998) globalisation theories, to discuss and develop translocal methodologies while resorting to global ethnography (Burawoy et al. 2000), multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1998) and multi-level analysis (Lang 2003). At the same time we wanted to elaborate on comparative approaches in order to understand diversity and commonalities following dimensions, typologies etc. in 'Muslim societies'. We conceived of development in a very broad sense of social change, brought about by political action, civil society and purposeful policy intervention. Our analytical, engendering perspective of analysis showed explanatory potential in various fields and translocal interfaces, such as the context of the local organisation of development, social and health security, economic and environmental strategies (Senegal, Cameroon) etc. As the empirical study has shown, struggling for a social space of access to knowledge and production of it as well as entering and re-structuring the public sphere, confronts authoritarian or non-committed States and, to an extent, religious authorities. Gender proves to be fundamental when it goes about rights and social equality in negotiating development.

Senegal maybe characterised as a secular state where Islam, however omnipresent in a localised Brotherhood structure is hardly relevant at all for development efforts, while some new radicalising movements ambition to compete with State legitimacy, for example with regard to debates on changes of the Family Code. In our empirical results we account for some local aspects of development implementation, such as women's networking or women's rights, with discourses aiming at keeping family obligations by men. Sudan – an Islamist State – stands for Islam being the permanent force as against which to negotiate room for manoeuvre by women and defining the meaning of global as against popular Islam, but at the same time poverty makes development issues omnipresent in all women's groups. Their social spaces

seem to have grown enormously in the context of present day conflict and peace debates with support from the international and donor community.

Sudan (Nageeb 2008) combats any diversity within Islam including local, often female popular Islam. Parts of society belonging to other religious dominations are not even taken into account within the official model. A strong pressure to open up to Western and global development donors (and partners concerning oil resources) as well as political conflict resolution and peace building leads to development discourses combining poverty with peace keeping and conflict resolution preoccupations. These inclusive discourses often purportedly take place in female spaces.

In Senegal (Sieveking 2008), by contrast, the Muslim societal background gives way to liberal, Western oriented development concepts such as New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), or global technocratic development programmes oriented towards poverty reduction, democracy and decentralisation. The Women in Development (as against the Gender and Development) approach seems to regain weight. The State is in close contact with Muslim brotherhoods, while Islamisation as conveyed in the global discourse, with its clear implications for gender and development, is politically critical.

Conclusion

Impact studies of new development and social policies do not usually give much attention to the new interactions and knowledge networks. Under the still prevailing paradigm of modernisation and under the umbrella of the paternalistic antipoverty ideology, these interactions are simply not being taken care of. Transnational relations in migration, new forms of shadow economy and the social embeddedness of all so called informal forms of economy, have only recently started to call for attention. The relational approach we want to promote goes far beyond studying reactions to impact, survival strategies etc. that are basically an avatar of exoticism. We point to transversal structurations and institutionalisations of grass-root networks in touch with global knowledge. A more ap-

propriate approach to the local assimilation of globalisation would link concepts of good governance and poverty to that of gender (Goetz, O'Brien 1995) and conceive economy as a gendered structure (Cagatay, Elson, Grown 1995) that is socially and globally embedded (Lachenmann, Dannecker eds. 2001).

Within this theoretical and methodological framework, analyses of 'impact' on women treated as 'vulnerable' groups are not at all relevant. What has to be analysed is social embeddedness of economy and the construction of gender images as well as visions of society underpinning interactions. Kabeer (1994) talks of a relational and dynamic planning approach. Subsistence and market economy interact in ways that need to be studied thoroughly, with female economy as one field of agency interacting with others. This is in tune with the call of critical macroeconomists apropos the relationship between reproductive economy and the productive sectors, as we look at markets providing livelihoods and the necessities of subsistence economy, while often segregated by gender and region, or entitlements and institutions. This approach blurs old distinctions between formal and informal sector but presupposes an upgrading of typically female economic fields and a realistic consideration of opportunities channelled through bureaucratic and authoritarian governing bodies or patrimonial structures. Modes of accumulation between formal and informal sector often pass through gender relations (e.g. Nairobi, Laaser 2001), with a generally high level of personal mobility along with highly personalised economic transactions. Diversity as implied by globalisation rests on interrelated ways of interactions, constitution of spaces, arenas and battlefields. We cannot be thinking anymore in terms of transfer of knowledge, patterns of modernity etc. The theorisation of globalisation rests on empirical studies of interconnectedness. Far away from a conception of neo-liberalism seen as a global 'anti-force', this perspective shuns either impact or resistance analysis. It is not, however, an entirely new or independent perspective.

Notes

[i]Paper given at the International Conference of the Euro-African Association for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development (APAD) on "Development, liberalism and modernity: trajectories for an anthropology of social change", Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, 13-15 December 2007

[1]Neither the constitutive character of this field for the general economy, nor the special interaction between formal and informal sector, which I suggest to address here, are the subject of serious examination. Furthermore, the processes of informalisation are not viewed as a part of ongoing transformations. Hart (2008, p. 4, 7), who brought up the concept of the informal sector in the 1970s taken up by ILO (1972), recently highlights the "dialectic of formal and informal economy in the context of 'development' discourse over the last four decades" and refers to the effects of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) as having an "informalising" effect on the economy. Meagher (2007) states an apparent decrease in knowledge about their present day reality yet growing interest and "expansion of informality"

[2]This could be observed in Senegal at a regional level by the chamber of commerce and artisans (with external support) on regional public–private contracting, as well as regarding the expanding mutual credit schemes.

[3]Financed by Volkswagen Foundation directed by the author and Petra Dannecker (Lachenmann, Dannecker eds. 2008). Salma Nageeb (2008) did field work in Sudan, Nadine Sieveking (2008) in Senegal.

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