



Participatory Assessment of Development

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Assessment of Environmental and Agricultural projects by Geneviève Audet-Bélanger (summary)

Geneviève Audet-Bélanger focused her research on projects in the domain of the natural environment and agriculture. The study compares common people's perceptions about environmental change and the impact of interventions in this domain to development agency's perspective on their own activities.

Geneviève organised 'PADev style' workshops in two villages near Langbinsi (Gbangu and Wundua). These villages have been involved in projects of the Presbyterian Agricultural Station in Langbinsi (PAS-L). In addition, she conducted semi-structured interviews with staff of governmental and non-governmental agencies (Church-based, local NGOs and international NGOs). Fieldwork for this research took place from January to April 2010.

Workshop participants identified soil fertility decline, more erratic rainfall and deforestation as major negative changes in their environment. Positive changes were the introduction of new crops, compost and manure. Local perceptions of environmental change did not differ significantly from the views of development agency staff who were interviewed.

Workshop participants were asked to identify projects that have taken place in the village over the past 20 years. The vast majority of the projects listed are related to the introduction of new crops, new techniques and practices. Some facilities were also mentioned such as boreholes, wells, dams, warehouses and silos for grain storage. The participants generally expressed a positive opinion about the projects with the exception of some projects that mal-

functioned or were not used to their full potential.

Villagers expressed that they foster and seek trust relationships with development agencies rather than notions of participation, local representation, long term commitment or focus on local priorities. The agencies also advocated for a relationship of trust between the villagers and their workers, but having long-term projects in communities was their main priority.

The workshops with villagers and sub-sequent interviews with practitioners revealed that environmental and agricultural interventions are often 'captured' by non-poor households. Power relations influence the implementation of projects at village level. In practice agricultural extension workers and other local staff prefer to work with individuals who they already know and who have already demonstrated their ability in supporting projects. This increases the likeliness of 'successful' implementation, but impedes a more equitable or pro-poor distribution of benefits.

Geneviève further found that villagers are rarely included in decision-making processes in terms of design, implementation and evaluation of projects.

Full reference: Audet-Bélanger, Geneviève (2010). Participatory Assessment of Environmental Projects: Concerns and Realities of Villagers and Development Organisations in the East Mamprusi District, Ghana, Northern Region, Ghana. *MA thesis*, University of Amsterdam.

