



Tropentag, September 16-18, 2015, Berlin, Germany

“Management of land use systems for enhanced food security:
conflicts, controversies and resolutions”

State Policies and Farmers’ Acquisition of Rangeland in Northern Benin

GEORGES DJOHY¹, ANGE HONORAT EDJA², NIKOLAUS SCHAREIKA¹

¹*Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Inst. for Social and Cultural Anthropology, Germany*

²*University of Parakou, Dept. of Rural Economics and Sociology, Benin*

Abstract

The Republic of Benin strives to become an agricultural power and emerging economy in the medium term. Many reforms were undertaken in various sectors to achieve this vision and numerous partnerships created regionally and internationally. However, the implementation of state policies involves different interpretations that can empower some actors over others in access to natural resources. Through an ethnographic study conducted for ten months in Gogounou district (North Benin), we scrutinized how state policies influence the relationships between grassroots actors who co-use resources. We adopted a political ecology perspective, assuming that ecological changes at the local level are highly correlated with the unbalanced power relations between actors. We also borrowed elements from actor-network theory that uses the concept of “translation” to show how a technology promoted in a given context can acquire meanings that the designers had never imagined. We found that the translation power with regard to different technologies provided through state policies is crucial in the way farmers and pastoralists use and control resources and thus impact on their peaceful interactions. The farmers in Gogounou were able to use herbicides supplied by private businesses for crop production to contest with herders by spraying the chemicals on large cultivated and uncultivated areas. They were also able to use seedlings provided through reforestation and environmental projects to increase their cashew plantations on rangeland, animal corridors and Fulani settlement areas. The farmers of Gogounou could also use the Rural Tenure Plans established in some villages within a context of new land policy to reassert their autochthony over Fulani pastoralists, and thereby challenge the latter’s citizenship and claim ownership of local land. These strategies led to forms of farmers’ acquisition of rangeland that make it difficult for pastoralism to continue in the region. The future seems increasingly uncertain for the Fulani of northern Benin, who are sometimes forced to migrate to other countries (Togo and Ghana). Our results could help create greater awareness of the ways farmers are giving different meanings to the promoted technologies and could lead to political action that allows more equitable access to local resources for all users.

Keywords: Benin, food security, natural resource management, pastoralism