

Including agricultural water management in the governance and sustainable development of rural territories

Policy Brief

Why?

- Water management is complex: it mobilises multiple actors for different uses at different scales and in relation to other resources such as land it is at the intersection of multiple territories, all of which are social constructs.
- In a context of climate change and scarcity, agricultural water is a major issue for the sustainable development of rural territories.
- When agricultural water management is limited to a sectoral and vertical approach, it is impeded in its ability to grasp the multiple challenges of rural areas and to link actions to other sectoral policies.
- Experience shows that the development of irrigation infrastructures does not systematically result in the greater sustainability and resilience of a territory. In view of this, it is appropriate to reconsider the approach to be adopted and how to proceed.

The sustainable development of a territory depends on the capacity of its actors to define, plan and finance actions that are part of a strategic vision promoted by a local authority and a locally legitimised institution. Establishing or strengthening inclusive territorial governance mechanisms helps to engage local actors in resource management, investment planning and conflict resolution. These mechanisms must be based on a system for producing and sharing knowledge about the territory and its resources.

The developments must therefore be part of a territorial project where agricultural water is linked to other local development priorities. This means adopting territorial approaches that make the management of agricultural water central to the governance and sustainable development of rural territories and their surroundings.

Territorial approaches provide an integrative framework that makes it possible to consider the challenges and stakeholders of territories together, to rely on local authorities and to articulate public policies in a sustainable, resilient territorial development trajectory. They foster coherence between the various levels of organisation (local/regional/national) based on the principle of subsidiarity, entailing dialogue between agricultural water stakeholders and those of other sectors.

“ A participatory diagnosis is a crucial stage in defining the place of agricultural water in the complexity of a territory and in building a shared vision ”

In West Africa, projects to support land management and local development have been based on territorial approaches since the 1980s. As decentralisation processes emerged, these projects evolved to support rural communities in fulfilling their mandate of economic and social development. The projects of the 2000s have continued this systematic expansion of the areas of action of these communities beyond hydro-agricultural development: land tenure management, agricultural development, institutional support to stakeholders, and investments of collective interest prioritised at local level. Participatory planning approaches are now increasingly placing local stakeholders at the heart of decision-making.

How?

Building a consultation process and a territorial coordination mechanism for agricultural water management

Territorial approaches should involve local actors from all sectors of activity in an iterative process of participation, consultation and joint decision-making so that all projects become anchored in a shared territorial dynamic, thus reducing risks of disconnection and inconsistency with local realities.

This involves ensuring close and permanent dialogue in decision-making spheres that can guarantee the representativity of project and public policy leaders as well as of local and external actors. This should be based on operational and adaptive participatory mechanisms that involve actors in the design of projects through to their evaluation. The political economics of differentiated access to agricultural water, and the risks and rights of the various actors, must not be overlooked during this process.

These mechanisms must be considered from a long term perspective, which means planning their financing and linkage, or even integration, with and into existing organisations. They should be mobilised regularly according to the actors' needs: when decisions are to be taken on investments and actions to be carried out, and during and after implementation with a view to rehabilitation or better integration within a territory.

Taking the time to consider agricultural water in relation to the complexity of the territory

Taking into account the challenges of a territory and ways to foster public participation and ownership requires time. Actions that are too hasty will overlook some issues which will have consequences on their effects and ownership by actors. Carrying out a participatory diagnosis is a crucial stage in defining the place of agricultural water in the complexity of a territory and in building a shared vision.

It also makes it possible to engage stakeholders in a process of progressive, collective construction around issues related to the environment, social justice and sustainable economic development.

Designing projects for a sustainable territorial trajectory

Projects should be conceived as tools for a broader public policy dialogue contributing to the dynamics of territories that are constantly evolving. This means paying particular attention to producing and sharing information: local actors must be able to follow-up and evaluate the changes achieved and prospects based on clear indicators.

The aim is to anticipate the future impacts of different climate change scenarios and to reduce the risks as far as possible for all of the actors in a territory and not only for the direct actors of a project.

It is also a question of guaranteeing the durability of the local institutional system and of the hydro-agricultural infrastructures. This means strengthening the skills needed to support the development of regulatory and legislative processes. It also entails improving local authorities' financial capacities, in particular by providing for arrangements to finance social engineering and infrastructure maintenance activities beyond the project timeframe strictly speaking.

Supporting technical, social and organisational innovation

Territorial approaches should draw on innovation processes observed in the field and support the most promising actions. These could be technical innovations (meteorological or hydrological information, a change in irrigation techniques, etc.) and/or social and organisational innovations: new collective decision-making or management scales, new professions (local mediators, project management delegation, etc.). These territorial approaches should also raise the question of the role of water in the development of creativity and innovation on the territory, as well as in the diversification of economic and social activities.

This text is the result of a collective effort undertaken with the support of the Comité scientifique et technique Eau agricole (COSTEA), and coordinated by Mathieu Boche (AFD - Agence française de développement), Julien Burte (Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement - CIRAD) and Meriem Jouini (Funceme). The following authors contributed: Quentin Ballin (AFD); Sami Bouarfa (Institut national de la recherche agronomique - INRAe); Sidy Seck (Université Gaston Bergé-Sénégal); Benjamin Vennat (BRLi); Jean-Louis Couture (independent expert); Alexia Hofmann (AFD); Abdellilah Taky (Institut agronomique et vétérinaire Hassan II); Pierre-Louis Mayaux (CIRAD); Ehssan El Meknassi (IAV Hassan II); Etienne Dressayre (BRL Ingénierie); Jean-Philippe Luc (CAGG); Vincent Kulesza (Société du canal de Provence); Boubacar Ba (Université Gaston Bergé); Patrick D'Aquino (CIRAD); Jean-Yves Jamin (CIRAD); Mohamed Naoufel Ben Haha (Direction générale de l'aménagement et de la conservation des terres agricoles (DGACTA, Tunisia); Amandine Adamczewski (CIRAD)

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