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## Governance of Water Resources in a Context of Decentralization in the Rural Commune of Guidimouni. Niger

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### Abstract

This study aims to understand the influence of socio-political governance on the optimisation of water resources in the rural commune of Guidimouni. To this end, a mixed approach made it possible to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. In total, a sample of 204 people was surveyed, including 180 people for the questionnaire survey and 24 others subject to individual semi-structured interviews. The results reveal fragmented management of water resources, characterized by a lack of coordination and synergy of action between the different structures and modes of governance, weak participation of the populations, as well as weak collaboration between stakeholders. The non-democratic functioning of governance structures and the non-compliance of statutory bodies also occupy a preponderant place. The analysis also shows low social acceptance of the new rules by stakeholders, resulting from a social representation of water as a gift from God. In addition, it reveals the existence of conflicts between the actors, reflecting their inability to unite for the development and maintenance of the works, as well as the non-compliance with local conventions governing the exploitation of water resources. All these governance difficulties negatively influence the optimisation of the municipality's water resources.

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### Introduction

Water resources constitute a major strategic issue for contemporary societies, particularly in the Sahelian countries where their scarcity threatens ecological, economic and social balances. According to [Falkenmark and Widstrand \(1992\)](#), many African countries are already in a situation of chronic water stress, a situation which can only worsen over the coming decades if the trend is not reversed. As [Gleick \(1993\)](#) points out, fresh water is a fundamental resource whose management

conditions not only food security, but also the political and social stability of communities. In the same vein, [Shiklomanov \(1993\)](#) points out that less than 3% of the water available on earth is fresh, and that only a fraction is accessible for human consumption, which gives water resources an unprecedented strategic value in a context of accelerated population growth. In this context, effective management of water resources is no longer an option but an absolute necessity. Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), conceptualized and promoted by the Global Water Partnership ([GWP, 2000](#)),

has become the dominant paradigm of international water policy since the Dublin Conference (1992). This integrative framework aims to reconcile the multiple uses of water, domestic, agricultural, industrial and environmental, by involving all stakeholders in decision-making. Water governance refers to the set of political, social, economic and administrative systems that govern the use, development and management of water resources (Rogers and Hall (2003)). This definition highlights the intrinsic complexity of water governance, which goes far beyond the technical framework to be part of social, political and cultural dynamics.

In West Africa, the decentralization reforms undertaken since the 1990s have profoundly reconfigured the institutional architectures for managing natural resources, particularly water. In Niger, the laws on decentralization (2001-2004) granted rural municipalities powers in the management of natural resources, including water. For Agrawal and Gibson (1999), community participation is not a natural or spontaneous process but the product of specific social and political configurations. The question of local water governance is also part of broader debates on development models and neoliberal reforms. The Dublin Conference (1992) established the principle of water as an economic good, opening the way to liberalization reforms. Swyngedouw (2004) criticized these reforms by showing how they produce inequalities of access and reinforce processes of marginalization of the most vulnerable populations.

In the Nigerien context, these dynamics manifest themselves through the coexistence of delegated, community and informal management methods that must be questioned. The rural commune of Guidimouni, in the Zinder region, constitutes a particularly relevant case study for exploring these governance dynamics. Endowed with significant water resources, a lake basin fed by permanent sources, a shallow water table, seasonal and permanent ponds, this municipality represents an atypical case in a region marked by strong pressure on water resources (Arifa, 2012). These hydraulic assets allow rural communities to carry out diversified market gardening and arboricultural activities, but also generate conflicts of use between actors with divergent interests. Decentralization has led to the establishment of new governance structures whose effectiveness for the sustainable management of water resources remains to be determined.

Faced with this observation, the present study aims to analyse the influence of socio-political governance on

the optimisation of water resources in the municipality of Guidimouni. It is part of a socio-anthropological approach attentive to institutional dynamics, social representations and power relations which structure local water governance. It intends to contribute to a more detailed understanding of the obstacles to effective and sustainable governance of water resources in rural Niger, in a context of still unfinished decentralization and accelerated climate change.

## **Materials and Methods**

The rural commune of Guidimouni is located in the southeastern part of the Damagaram Takaya department (Zinder region). It covers an area of 660 km<sup>2</sup> and its population is estimated at 88,209 inhabitants in 2018, based on the 2012 general census. The Guidimouni basin covers an area of approximately 218.26 ha. The hydrological system is fed by two ponds ("male" and "female"), one of which is permanent ("female" pond, with an area of approximately 85 ha) and the other semi-permanent ("male" pond, approximately 105 ha). It is a flush water basin fed by several sources: Gouzgourou (the main source), Kouta, Bijatari, Igguiya, Idan Gabas and Daoulawa (Arifa, 2012). The water table is very shallow, generally less than 1.5 m.

The very favorable agro-ecological conditions (permanent humidity, fertile soils) allow populations to practice market gardening (cabbage, salad, onion, carrot, tomato) and fruit growing (mango, guava, lemon, date, banana). Water availability and soil fertility offer the possibility of carrying out two or three crop cycles, allowing farmers to increase yields and spread production over the entire year by combining seasonal crops and annual crops (sugar cane, cassava) (Kabirou & Salifou, 2017).

In this municipality, the base covering is made up of wind turbines and clay and precipitation is of the order of 230 to 470 mm depending on the year. There are two (2) types of aquifers in the commune: the Korama water table and the water table isolated from the crystalline base and the alterite water table. Data collection took place in three villages in the commune: Guidimouni, Koussa and Garin Makada. The choice of these three villages was made on the basis of a simple random drawing. The approach adopted combines individual semi-structured interviews, direct observations and a questionnaire survey. The quantitative component covered 180 people, heads of household and other water users, selected on the basis of a simple random survey.

For the qualitative aspect, the reasoned choice technique was used. Interviewees were targeted based on their skills and experience in the field. In total, 24 interviews were carried out in the three villages. Collection was discontinued following theoretical saturation, which, according to Mucchielli (1991, p.116), is the phenomenon that occurs when the data collected is no longer new and all efforts to collect additional information become useless. The interviews were fully recorded and transcribed. Direct observation focused on the practices and attitudes of users, the modes of exploitation and management of water resources, as well as cohabitation between stakeholders. The data from the interviews and observation were subjected to a thematic content analysis (Albarelo, 1999) while the data from the questionnaire were subject to quantitative and statistical analysis using SPSS and Excel software. In total, the study sample included 204 people.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results of the study are structured into two main axes: the organisation of socio-political governance and the optimisation of water resources, and social perceptions of water governance and the optimisation of hydraulic resources.

### **Water resources governance structures at community level**

The governance of water resources in the three villages studied is marked by the establishment, at the local level, of three types of management structures, as part of the transfer of skills from the water sector to local authorities. At the level of the rural commune of Guidimouni, these structures are: the Association of Public Water Service Users (AUSPE), the Water Point Management Committee (CGPE) and the Local Water Committee (CLE). The AUSPE is a public water service management structure, set up in localities with hydraulic infrastructures such as Drinking Water Supply (AEP) and Autonomous Water Station (PEA). Its objective is to defend the interests of consumers and to monitor the actions of the delegatee, in accordance with the contract signed between the operator and the town hall.

The CGPE is a governance body set up for localities with large diameter cemented wells (PCGD), boreholes equipped with human-powered pumps (FEPMH) and traditional wells. It is responsible for ensuring good management and compliance with legal rules on access and use of water resources. The CLE is a more recent

structure, created to support the operationalization of the principles of IWRM in the context of decentralization. However, not all localities in the municipality have a CLE, despite the financial means available, even though they meet the required conditions. This body aims to ensure compliance with local rules and conventions relating to the preservation and exploitation of water resources.

### **Lack of coordination between the different management structures at the municipal level**

Synergy of action between governance actors and coordination of different management methods are essential for optimal and sustainable exploitation of water resources. However, on the ground, the reality is quite different. The multiplicity of structures and actors creates a coordination problem. The majority of respondents (76%) affirm that water resources management methods are not coordinated. Each actor exploits resources according to its own needs and interests, without convergence of ideas with other management structures. As this interviewee explains:

The delegatee is an economic operator from outside who is responsible for ensuring the operation of large hydraulic works. He manages the water with his local accomplices and makes a lot of money. The other works are managed by a structure set up by the villagers. However, the traditional authorities and the delegatee do not agree on the question of water management. They have many divergent interests (municipal president of the water users association, November 2024).

The weak collaboration between governance actors is also documented. Thus, 62.2% of respondents mentioned a lack of collaboration. This situation does not allow the establishment of a common policy for the exploitation and optimal use of water resources. The governance of water resources is thus characterized by institutional fragmentation which leads to the degradation of certain structures and the abandonment of infrastructure due to the failure of the management model. Figure 2 is a broken down human-powered pump while Figure 3 is an abandoned standpipe. Unaddressed structural breakdowns and outright abandonment of hydraulic resources are the direct consequence of ineffective management marked by fragmentation, lack of coordination and tensions between stakeholders.

In rural areas in general, people are happy to get supplies for free. This is why they prefer community management

rather than delegated management which is promoted and recommended by the Nigerien state. These behaviors do not allow the delegatee to cover the revenues necessary to ensure the proper functioning of the systems which are in its charge. I think that the lack of coordination between the different management methods is the source of the poor functioning of our structures.

Indeed, today we are witnessing a proliferation of private boreholes whose water quality is very doubtful and which constitute competition for delegated management (Departmental Director of Hydraulics, November 2024).

This institutional fragmentation observed in Guidimouni illustrates what [Cleaver and Franks \(2005\)](#) conceptualized as institutional tinkering: local actors assemble, adapt and combine formal and informal rules in a pragmatic manner, producing hybrid arrangements whose coherence is often lacking. This institutional hybridity, far from being an exceptional dysfunction, reflects the normal condition of natural resource governance in African post-decentralization contexts ([Lund, 2006](#)). Lund shows in fact that in many African states, sovereignty is fragmented between multiple actors, traditional authorities, decentralized administrations, local authorities, civil society organisations, whose skills and legitimacies overlap and clash. This configuration inevitably produces areas of institutional overlap generating conflicts of jurisdiction detrimental to hydraulic structures and resources.

The multiplicity of water governance structures observed in the municipality of Guidimouni (AUSPE, CGPE, CLE, traditional authorities), is part of this logic of institutional pluralism. According to [Meinzen-Dick and Pradhan \(2002\)](#), legal and institutional pluralism in the management of natural resources can constitute both a source of flexibility and a factor of confusion, depending on the ability of actors to negotiate common rules and enforce them. However, as Baron and [Bonnasieux \(2013\)](#) point out, in contexts where delegated operators coexist with community structures without clear coordination mechanisms, opportunistic behaviour of users inevitably develops, to the detriment of the sustainability of resources.

### **Inefficiency of the mode of governance and problem of optimisation of water resources**

The ineffectiveness of the mode of governance essentially results in non-democratic governance marked in particular by the monopolization of management

structures by influential families, the non-holding of bodies and the exclusion of a significant segment of the population, particularly women. According to 84.4% of respondents, the management method in force in the municipality of Guidimouni does not seem effective in achieving optimisation of resources. Delegated management recognized by the State fails to ensure the operation of hydraulic installations, while community management, characterized by a *laissez-faire* policy, favors the development of informal drilling and the uncontrolled exploitation of certain structures.

The non-democratic functioning of governance structures documented in this study echoes [Berry's \(1993\)](#) analyzes of the dynamics of access to natural resources in Africa. Berry showed that access to resources is not only determined by formal property rights, but by social relations, kinship, clientelism, ethnicity, which mediate the exercise of these rights. In this context, customary authorities play the role of gate-keepers whose legitimacy is both traditional and reinforced by the practices of arbitrary designation of members of management committees. "The appropriation of certain management structures by influential families limits the effectiveness of the management method. It is also necessary to highlight a problem of coherence and synergy of policies and legal provisions between the different management structures" (former mayor of the municipality, November 2024).

Thus, the monopolization of certain management structures by traditional aristocracies also limits the effectiveness of the management method and equitable access to water resources. Also, the majority of water supply sources in the municipality are polluted according to 68.9% of respondents. This pollution is due to the harmful practices of users: dumping of household waste around wells, use of nitrates and chemical fertilizers, lack of hygiene around sources. This inability of actors to ensure supervision and control of the exploitation of hydraulic resources takes place in a context where informal community management persists under the appearance of delegated management with the same customary notables in charge.

Local water governance structures suffer from their non-democratic nature and a lack of representativeness. The members of these structures most often come from the family of customary authorities and are designated by the chiefs. Entire social groups, migrants and women in particular, are not sufficiently involved in decision-making bodies. When they are, they most of the time



occupy secondary positions (hygienist, treasurer), even though women are the main actors of water in daily life.

Here, at home, women are not at all involved in water management, particularly in strategic positions, even if they are, as recommended in the new rules of governance initiated by the decentralized authorities, they generally occupy no less important positions, such as hygienist, treasurer. Because in my opinion, women do not have the skills required to chair a structure for the management of the common good, they do not go far in school. As soon as they reach a certain age level, they must get married and devote themselves solely to Koranic studies and taking care of their homes (village chief, November 2024).

The exclusion of women from water governance bodies constitutes a structural problem that socio-anthropology has widely documented. [Zwarteveen \(1997\)](#) developed a feminist analysis of irrigation management showing how water rights are systematically gendered, with women defined as users without property or decision-making rights. This marginalization is not trivial; it deprives governance systems of the detailed knowledge of daily water use practices that women, as domestic managers of this resource, have in a privileged manner. As [Agarwal \(1997\)](#) and [Cleaver \(2000\)](#) point out, the inclusion of women in decision-making bodies is not only a question of equity but a condition for the effectiveness of governance. The exclusion of migrants from governance structures refers to the analyzes of [Cotula \(2006\)](#) on the land rights of migrants in West Africa. Cotula showed that migrants, often perceived as temporary and illegitimate users of resources, are systematically marginalized in local institutional arrangements, which pushes them to adopt short-term exploitative behaviors detrimental to the sustainability of resources.

More generally, the participation of populations in water governance in the municipality leaves much to be desired. Thus, 71.1% of those questioned said they were not involved. This absence is justified by the fact that the structures present do not organize governance meetings to which they suit the populations. Since the establishment of certain structures, those responsible for monitoring have never convened an official meeting to take stock of the management of hydraulic resources. Other members are even unaware of their membership in the management committee. This amateurish management leads to dysfunctions in management structures with the effect of degrading the municipality's water resources.

## **Social logics, governance and optimisation of water resources**

### **Social perceptions of water management rules and lack of optimisation**

The results reveal that 62.2% of respondents said they were informed about the new water governance rules, compared to 37.8% who said they had no knowledge of these rules. However, knowledge of management rules by stakeholders is not a sufficient condition for their compliance. The applicability of these rules or their rejection depends on the social reading that the actors make of them. The appropriation of new governance rules by stakeholders is essential to achieve sustainable optimisation of resources.

However, a significant proportion of respondents (54.4%) perceive these new rules as contrary to local socio-cultural values and norms. These respondents therefore show a tendency to reject them. In the popular imagination, this weak social acceptance of the new rules is justified by the fact that some of the principles of governance are not anchored in the socio-cultural context of the locality; in particular, the principle of reconsideration of women in new management structures, the consideration of water as an economic good, the limitation of land which gives rise to new actors without rights, the questioning of the management power previously exercised by local actors over hydraulic resources.

There are of course new rules regarding water governance here in Guidimouni, but the application of these local rules and conventions regarding management is reduced. This leaves room for countless conflicts between users. The inapplicability of new rules is materialized by bad practices around bodies of water in particular, the occupation of lake banks by market gardeners, the transformation of these banks into a dump by local populations, the uncontrolled use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides which favour the development of tifa Australia and water pollution. (Communal environmental manager, November, 2024).

This figure, just like the comments clearly illustrates, the attitudes and behaviors of certain actors regarding water resources and the new management rules. This poor assessment of the actors limits the implementation of management rules, anything which does not promote the optimisation and sustainable management of the municipality's water resources. A problem of social

acceptance and adoption of new management rules was therefore noted. Thus, according to the people surveyed, the introduction of new rules in terms of water management could give rise to new actors without rights of access or control. As such, [Marc et al., \(2006\)](#), assert that national frameworks, to be effective, must also allow local agreements, adjusted to practices considered legitimate by stakeholders and best protecting the resource. [Ostrom's \(1990\)](#) work on the governance of the commons has profoundly influenced contemporary approaches to water resources management. Ostrom demonstrated empirically that local communities can develop sustainable institutions for managing common resources, provided that certain design principles are met: clearly defined boundaries, rules adapted to local conditions, user participation in modifying the rules, effective monitoring, graduated sanctions, conflict resolution mechanisms and external recognition. In the case of Guidimouni, several of these conditions are not met, which partly explains the ineffectiveness of governance.

### **Social representations of water and governance**

The study reveals four types of social representations linked to water in the commune of Guidimouni: water as a gift from God (51% of respondents), water as a capital resource (40%), water as a source of tension (4.4%) and water as a source of wealth and happiness (4.4%). The dominant representation, water as a gift from God, prevents the strict application of local rules and conventions in terms of management. "Water is essential for the foundation and maintenance of any society. Guidimouni means water. She is a gift from God. Water does not belong to anyone, it is faith. It cannot be sold. Whoever dares to sell it risks provoking divine wrath" (comment by an imam, November 2024).

This representation is part of what [Trottier \(1999\)](#) analysed as hydrosocialities, the ways in which societies socially construct their relationships with water. For Trottier, uses and rights over water are not natural or technical data but social constructions embedded in systems of values, beliefs and power relations. The sacralization of water, far from being a simple obstacle to rational governance, reveals a water ethic which deserves to be taken seriously by managers and decision-makers. This social representation leads to non-responsible behaviour: users behave as if they were the only users and consider water as an infinite resource. Social representations thus negatively influence the governance of water resources in this locality.

[Akpona et al., \(2015\)](#), documented similar phenomena in the Beninese context, showing how religious symbolism and ritual practices associated with water profoundly shape user behaviors and forms of social regulation of access to this resource. In Hausa society, water is closely linked to Islamic practices of purification and hospitality, which gives it a spiritual and social value that transcends its purely utilitarian dimension. As [Bouju \(2000\)](#) points out for Sahelian societies, this symbolic dimension of water cannot be ignored by governance policies without risking generating deep resistance. The socio-anthropology of natural resources, in line with [Descola \(2005\)](#) and his work on non-modern ontologies, invites us to reconsider the presuppositions which underlie the dominant approaches to water governance. Descola showed that the separation between nature and culture, which underpins Western approaches to natural resource management, is far from universal. In many African cultures, natural resources, including water, are entities endowed with their own agency, inserted in networks of social and spiritual relationships which condition usage practices and regulatory norms.

### **Legitimacy of actors, access conflicts and optimisation**

The question of the legitimacy of actors is a source of conflict. 96.7% of respondents declared the existence of conflicts around water resources. Conflicts arise because actors refuse to respect local rules and conventions governing the exploitation of resources. Everyone exploits resources according to their immediate needs, without worrying about the sustainability of the structures. This is particularly the case of breeders who, considering themselves temporary users, engage in irrational exploitation of resources.

I am personally responsible for surface water management as head of water. Here in Guidimouni, the only problems that matter to us are mainly tensions with breeders. God only knows the number of conflicts we record each year. They come to water their animals in the ponds and wells which were made by our grandparents and which we have used for a long time for our water needs. When they come, they not only dry up the source but also take advantage of it to ravage all the fodder found there and cause damage to our market gardens. They also allow themselves to excessively cut down plants that will serve as fodder for their animals, which exposes our water resources to high evaporation (Charge of water resources affairs of the traditional chieftdom, November 2024).

Conflicts between the administration and local populations have also been documented. The populations complain about the behaviour of the administration which prohibits the use of private drilling, described as informal works, even though they were carried out with the resources of the communities themselves. These institutional tensions amplify the dysfunctions of hydraulic governance.

At one point, Hydraulics in complicity with the town hall wanted to prevent us from consuming water from the works, which we built with our own means, supposedly because the water is not of good quality. Even tomorrow, we will use it, we understand the games. They want to force us to pay for water from the delegatee (Village chief, November 2024).

The conflicts between actors, breeders and farmers, populations and administration, users and delegates, documented in this study illustrate the power dynamics which structure the governance of water resources. For Swatuk (2005), hydraulic conflicts are not simple technical disputes over the management of a rare resource, but manifestations of asymmetrical power relations embedded in broader social and political structures. In this context, conflict resolution cannot be limited to technical or institutional adjustments but must necessarily involve a reconfiguration of power relations and recognition of the rights of marginalized actors.

Benjaminsen and Boubacar Ba (2009) analysed conflicts between farmers and herders in the Sahel from a historical and political perspective, showing how these conflicts are exacerbated by land policies and institutional reforms which weaken the access rights of herders to natural resources, particularly water points. In the case of Guidimouni, the recurring tensions between breeders and farmers around water resources are part of this long-term dynamic, which decentralization reforms have not succeeded in easing, due to a lack of mediation mechanisms and institutional recognition of the rights of breeders. Olivier de Sardan (1995) developed an approach to the anthropology of development that is particularly relevant for analysing conflicts around water resources. It shows how development projects generate dynamics of brokerage and capture of resources by strategically positioned local actors, who use their access to formal institutions to consolidate their control over resources. This developing brokerage logic is clearly at work in water governance in Guidimouni, where certain influential families appropriate management structures to control access to this strategic resource.

However, as Baland and Platteau (1996) point out, community management of natural resources is not always more effective than state or private management. Its effectiveness depends on specific social and institutional conditions, social cohesion, absence of excessive inequalities, stability of rules, which may be absent in many African contexts. Petit (2009) showed that water resources are socio-natural constructs whose governance cannot be analysed independently of the social and political relationships that shape them.

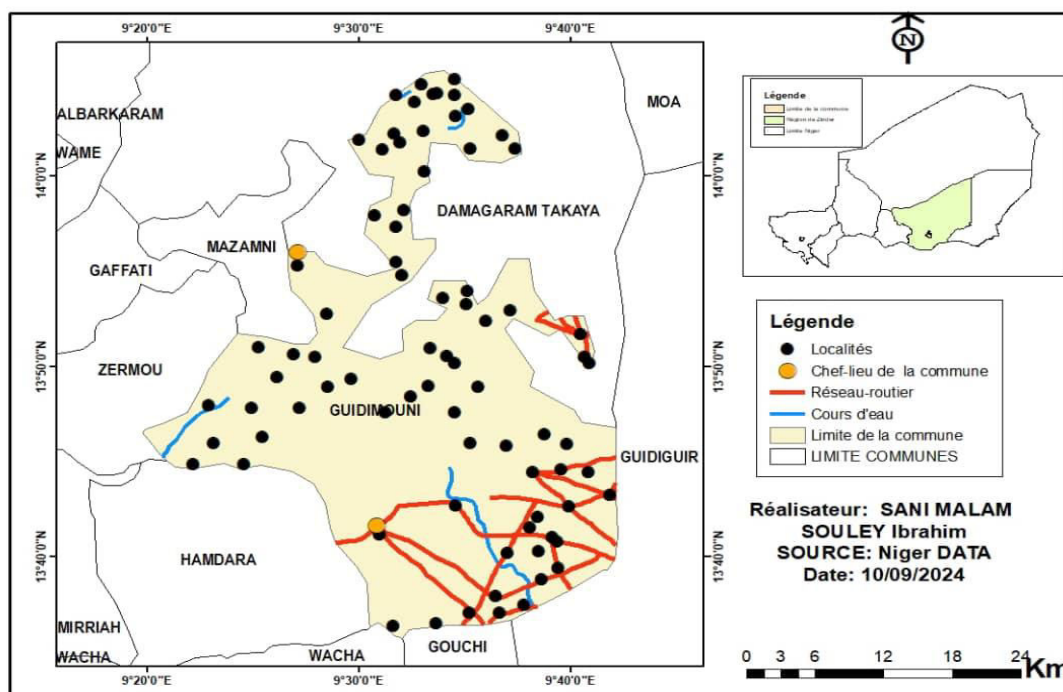
### **Community participation: between normative ideal and social realities**

The lack of population participation in water governance (71.1% of respondents) directly calls into question the participatory paradigm which has structured development policies since the 1990s. Mosse (2004) developed an in-depth critique of this paradigm by showing how participation is often more of an instrument for legitimizing external interventions than a real process of sharing decision-making power. The water governance structures put in place as part of Nigerien decentralization have reproduced this logic: they were designed according to standardized models poorly suited to local social realities, which partly explains their ineffectiveness.

Long (2001) developed an actor-oriented perspective that highlights the need to analyse the diversity of social responses to development policies, recognizing that local actors are not simple passive recipients of external interventions but active agents who adapt, resist and transform policies according to their own logics and interests. From this perspective, the low participation rate observed in Guidimouni is not simply a lack of mobilization, but the result of a rational distrust of populations towards governance structures perceived as illegitimate and unrepresentative of their interests.

Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (1998) introduced the concept of local development arenas to analyse the spaces of negotiation and conflict in which the different local development actors confront each other. These arenas are structured by asymmetrical power relations and divergent logics of interest which make the construction of coherent collective action very difficult. Water governance in Guidimouni perfectly illustrates this dynamic: the different decision-making arenas, municipalities, customary structures, formal management structures, coexist without being able to articulate their logic of action.

**Figure.1** Geographical location of the commune of Guidimouni



**Figure.2.** Abandoned human power pump



Source. Field survey, November 2024

**Figure.3** Abandoned fountain hydrant



Source. Field survey, November 2024

**Figure.4** Human-powered pump installed in front of the chief's courtyard



Source. Field survey, November 2024



**Figure.5** Lake banks, transformed into a dump



**Source.** Field survey, November 2024

### **Decentralization and local governance: between promises and realities**

Decentralization is often presented as the royal road to better governance of natural resources. However, as [Agrawal and Ribot \(1999\)](#) have shown, decentralization does not automatically produce better local governance: it can also reproduce, or even amplify, existing inequalities by transferring decision-making power to local elites who do not necessarily have an interest in managing resources in a sustainable and equitable manner. This thesis finds empirical confirmation in the case of Guidimouni, where decentralization led to the creation of new governance structures without fundamentally modifying local power relations.

For [Ribot et al., \(2006\)](#), real and democratic decentralization requires not only a formal transfer of skills, but also a transfer of resources and effective accountability of local actors to the populations. These conditions are far from being met in Guidimouni, where water governance structures operate without effective citizen control mechanisms. [Blundo and Olivier de Sardan \(2007\)](#) have documented practices of corruption and poor governance in African administrations, showing how they pervert decentralization processes and compromise the quality of public services, including access to water.

As [Ouedraogo \(2003\)](#) and [Bambara \(2017\)](#) have shown in the Burkinabe context, local water governance is often hampered by administrative burdens, a lack of financial resources and weak technical capacity of local authorities. These findings are consistent with those of [Tidjani Alou et al., \(2011\)](#) for Niger, who emphasize that

decentralization has created new skills without always providing the resources necessary for their effective exercise.

Ultimately, the results of this study illustrate the complexity of the dynamics of water resources governance in rural Niger.

They invite us to go beyond technocratic and normative approaches to adopt a socio-anthropological perspective which fully takes into account social representations, power relations, institutional dynamics and the logics of actors in all their complexity.

### **Conclusion**

Water resources in the rural commune of Guidimouni in Niger face significant constraints linked to governance problems. The analysis of the influence of the socio-political dimension of governance on the optimisation of water resources has highlighted an ineffectiveness of management methods resulting in:

- fragmented management, characterized by a lack of coordination between the different local structures and management methods;
- weak synergy of action between governance actors;
- low participation of local people;
- low social acceptance of the new rules, linked to certain social representations which consider water as a gift from God;
- conflicts of legitimacy between actors, particularly between local populations and breeders, between administration and populations.

These governance difficulties have negative consequences on the exploitation of water resources and make their optimisation difficult in the municipality. This study does not exhaust the reflection on the socio-political governance of water resources: other more specific subjects deserve to be explored in greater depth in order to provide solutions to the problems which threaten the sustainability of these resources. In particular, future research could explore mechanisms for including marginalized actors, women, migrants, breeders, in governance bodies, as well as methods of promoting local knowledge and social representations of water in the development of management policies better adapted to local socio-cultural realities.

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