

ACTION AND REFLECTION ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT : CONSTRUCTION OF LOCAL VALUE IN THE LOWER SENEGAL RIVER VALLEY

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In Senegal, rice imports have long made up for deficits in domestic production. The post-colonial government of Senegal attempted to increase rice self-sufficiency by exploiting rice fields in the Senegal River Valley. The program involved intervention by state-controlled corporations in both rice production and markets. However, these corporations incurred enormous debt. The government then implemented Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) initiatives that reduced government interventions. Peasant Organizations, organized exclusively by peasants, took a central role in rice production and field exploitation.

Here, I examine how “local value” has been constructed for development through actions and reflections in Village T of the Lower Senegal River Valley. First, I consider Graeber’s [2001] and Otsuka’s [1997, 2002] concepts of value. According to Graeber, value is “the way in which actions become meaningful to the actor by being incorporated in some larger, social totality.” Social totality “exists primary in the actor’s imagination” in many cases [Graeber 2001; xii]. Otsuka indicated that local value can be adapted to a global value, assumed to be a Western notion; this global value can be an instrument for controlling and suppressing local value [Otsuka 1997, 2002].

Second, I discuss the recent history of rural development in the Lower Senegal River Valley with respect to the following question. Has government intervention led to conflicts between the global values of the government and the local values of rural peasants or have peasants adapted and localized a global value to their local values?

Finally, I consider rural development managed by the Peasant Organization in Village T. Through field exploitation and canal expansion, the Peasant Organization has functioned as an agent for autonomous rural development. In addition, development projects have incorporated local values of reciprocity and equality.

Keywords: Autonomous rural development, Construction of value, Local value, Peasant organization, Value of rural development.