

THE ROLE OF “LOCAL VALUE” FOR AUTONOMIC RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE LOWER SENEGAL RIVER

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This paper discusses the role of “local value” for autonomic rural development in the Lower Senegal River. Based on my field research in Village T, it focuses on the activities of a Peasant Organization, run by the local peasants themselves. The concern with local value, as opposed to global value, in developing countries has been growing in economic and anthropological studies. However, there is little agreement concerning the roles of local value for development, or even on a definition for “local value.” According to David Graeber and Kazuo Otsuka, local value can be defined as “the way in which actions become meaningful to the actor by being incorporated” in social totality. Social totality “exists primarily in the actor’s imagination” in many cases. “Global value” is commonly seen within local value.

The government of Senegal intervened in the use of rice fields, in the production of rice products and in the marketplace in the Lower Senegal River, introducing global values into local farming life. After the Structural Adjustment Program was introduced, the peasants themselves created Peasant Organizations that have reduced government intervention in rural development. One activity of the Peasant Organization involves mediation between the agricultural financial institutions and the peasants. The repayment rate in Village T is higher than usual in Africa because of the reciprocity system practiced by the peasants. Another of the Organization’s activities involves autonomic rural development. In an attempt to equalize development, the Peasant Organization has appropriated new fields, giving them to younger married men to cultivate. Reciprocity and equality, in the context of the farming community, are seen in other aspects of their daily life, and include customs such as inter-household group eating, the Zakāt of Islam, and the distribution of crops.

First, I will discuss the actions the peasants have taken in their own attempts at rural development, and how their experiences of rural development have become meaningful to them as peasants by being incorporated into rural society. I will also explore the ways in which the peasants’ actions reflexively construct the local value of rural community, measuring the importance of an action through its value. Second, I will examine the roles of local value for rural development in the Lower Senegal River from a Moral Economic perspective. I will explore the relationship between local value, as it is observed in the rural community, and local value, as observed in activities of the Peasant Organization. What I wish to show is that the local value of reciprocity and equality in rural communities does not necessarily curtail rural development, and that it may actually sustain autonomic rural development or lead to creative development.

Keywords: Local value, Value under rural development, Autonomic rural development, Peasant organization, Moral economy