

# Rural Communities, Development Policies and Social Sciences Practice: Advocacy for a Citizenship of Research in Sub-Saharan Africa

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## Abstract

This work aims at restoring the importance of social sciences within African communities. It also aims at creating a sort of deep interest or devotion among African researchers leading them to go deep into local knowledge and get inspiration in order to develop theories adapted to the realities of their societies. It demonstrates in a practical way the usefulness of the social sciences in any development enterprise. Being true that rural African communities are laboratories where indigenous techniques are developed, then, African researchers must use appropriate approaches to analyze that social facts place them at the centre of any scientific action. They must go and meet the locals (African men) at their site of knowledge where creation and invention are made in order to produce scientific knowledge able to induce social transformation. The indigenization of research itself is a scientific approach dealing with cultural facts whose investigation tools must necessarily contribute to knowledge production directly usable for the targeted social group. Therefore this article is a plea for endogenous research that development policies often ignore.

## Keywords

Development Policies, Indigenization, Rural Communities, Social Sciences, Sub-Saharan-Africa

## 1. Introduction

The African rural communities became from the colonial period till date, the theater of development policies. They are crossed by external political interventions (cantonal groupings), agricultural (agricultural mechanization, populariza-

tion of selected techniques and seed varieties), social (construction of health centers, supply of potable water points), or even community (local, rural development project ...). All this interventionist tendency could stand as a miracle solution in solving the peasant malaise. This article aims at studying the rural development projects based on the application of social sciences in a process of citizenship.

But, before we get into the heart of our reflection, it seemed necessary to shed light on some major words whose understanding can lend itself to equivocal meanings. These include the concepts of:

- rural communities

In a reference book considered today as classical, Ferdinand Tönnies opposed the Community (*Gemeinschaft*) to the society (*Gesellschaft*) [1]. André Lalande reports this distinction established by Tönnies in these terms: "Community is all that, in the thought or social representation of men, is natural or spontaneous; society, on the other hand, refers to artistic creation (in the sense of organized social techniques)". From the above, the community is seen as something immutable in the natural life of men. It is a fact inextricably linked to the human essence; it must therefore be designed in the most normal way. Pierre Ansart and André Akoun believe that "the depth of the community's tie is opposed to the artifice of societal tie" [2]. These two approaches oppose the community to society without making a definition singularly. Tönnies himself by opposing the *Gemeinschaft* to the *Gesellschaft* does not specify that the two notions can intermingle. This makes the distinction between the two complex notions with regard to the rigidity of the etymological borders separating them.

However, it should be remembered that as part of this work, rural community is referred to all social groups defined by a number of characteristics (Habitat, social organization, Division of labour, forms of aggregation, production and reproduction system, etc.) and living in rural areas. The rural community does not establish this fact only by the adherence of these members to certain values and their participation in the social life defined by such values (food loans for example), but (it) presents itself as a sphere within which individuals are motivated by Community representations and practices.

- social sciences

The social sciences had a recent but brutal appearance in the scientific community. Encompassing initially a certain social anthropology, an Ethnology of the primitive and a social economy (sociology being excluded because it is reserved for societies that have undergone industrialization), the social sciences emerged in the years 60 in Africa. Sociology will be (re) introduced in the analysis of societies with G. Balandier (1955). Y. Goussault and A. Guichaoua state that these sciences have the task of studying African societies in action through movements of uprisings, decolonization and sociopolitical crises [3]. However, a definition will be given by A. Akoun and P. Ansart, which refer to social sciences as "the whole of science aimed at studying practices, expressions and social rela-

tions, as well as social systems”. Unlike the pure sciences of which they are otherwise opposed, the social sciences are often complex human disciplines and controversies in their approach because of the arduous tasks assigned to them: explaining a social reality permanently fluctuating and ambivalent. Here it is understood by the term of social sciences, a set of disciplines with scientific processes and approaches that attempt to decipher the social reality in a multi-disciplinary approach or “pluri-sexualisation” of the sciences [4]. The practice of these Sciences would gain by tropicalizing and apprehending the field of African development by Africa itself.

- citizenship

From the word citizen, which means inhabitant of a city, of a State enjoying civil and political rights, citizenship is a process whereby one confers a citizen character on something, an individual, a social group or a practice. A search is called citizen when it integrates the local dimension or better the reality of citizens in its fields of investigation. In other words, this is a scientific draft that puts the citizens and their ordinary practices at the centre of its approach, their hotlines and breakdowns, their evolutionary forces and the contradictions inherent in their social life, thus citizens. Whether it is citizen research or a scientific rationality of the context in the sense of ELA [5] the citizenship of research in our understanding must be a cultural scientific paradigm in which human historicities are the materials of its elaboration. It is simply a methodological approach that re-inserts the citizens and their local cultures into the field of scientific reflexivity. For us, a citizen research also refers to an indigenous, endogenous research that respects the knowledge that is built on a daily basis in the “low people” but which are not devoid of scientific rationality.

- basic research

The term “basic research”, referring to a form of research carried out without any application in sight, was introduced in the current use at the beginning of the twentieth century. Before this century, technology had often preceded science. Technical progress was made and the explanation was then sought. Fundamental research, as research undertaken to acquire new knowledge, is therefore not geared toward a specific purpose or practical realization. This does not relegate it to the category of “useless scientific activities”, as the Chinese revolutionary Mao Tse-toung believed, which denied the value and usefulness of the latter during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. He was fusing the Chinese scholars for wasting the means they had for absent-minded and vain experiments.

Basic research holds an important place and is the basis for solving tomorrow’s problems just as research action solves those of today. In short, the fundamental research gives material for reflection to research action to serve mankind. Basic research, also known as research for research, allows to store knowledge on a specific field and to base the scientific achievements that will necessarily prove useful for development actions.

## **2. Development Policies in the Face of Rural Communities**

Development policies have become more than an alternative, a simple model of intervention in rural areas but a necessity for the growth of African villages. Today, it is simply no longer possible to talk about the development of rural communities without including developers (projects or policy developments). However, the relationship of development policies with rural communities exacerbate conflicts due to a “fundamental misunderstanding” [6] that make it difficult for these projects to succeed.

### **2.1. Development Policies**

Any development project is accompanied by a development policy. It is the latter which plays the role of Scout in the project and defines the strategies and methods [5] to follow. Overall, development policies refer to the actions, the means, and the tools that any project needs to develop for its smooth running. The choice of methodology and approach, personnel management and financing, communication tools and workshops is determined by the already predefined development policies.

In francophone black Africa, the development policies that have succeeded since the years 60 to 90's have generally resulted in failures. They have focused on research and development (R and D), research-action (R-A) modernization, development, community or integrated building, etc., designed (conceived) on the basis of a europeocentrism that refuses to recognize the ability of African companies to stimulate development dynamics themselves.

Development policies have always kept African rural communities in low esteem. Opinionated of their position as developers, they convey the idea of rural societies illogical, homogeneous and cold. The dynamics of development and social change were denied to African communities. Jean-Marc. ELA to say: “to want to dictate the laws of development to men and women who want to inculcate the consciousness of being blind in front of those who know and bring light, these strategies help to block the resources that should be as soon as one agrees to listen to the ‘ignorant peasants’” [7]. However, development professionals are reluctant to go down to this level. “It is the paradox of the infantilisation of the rural people and the denial of their knowledge. In the same way, development policies, by conveying a culture other than that of the local milieu, vegetating struggles linked to the ‘function of brokering’”.

The peasant resistance grossly described as anti-development is in reality a reaction of local knowledge, an opposition to an imperialist modernity and an affirmation of a culture that is still poorly evaluated if not denied by development policies. This is also the main cause of conflicts between African developers and rural communities.

### **2.2. Practical Knowledge against Scientific Knowledge? The Dangers of an Extrovert Theorization**

Living in a given environment, men develop techniques and ways to adapt to

them. Precarious environmental situations inspire men with knowledge and practical methods. In rural areas, peasant knowledge and agrarian civilizations consist of daily and secular agricultural practices whose effective social utility is duly recognized. For example, the agrarian practices developed by the people of Monts Mandara in northern Cameroon to which the harshness of the environment inspired an agriculture on the terrace. Bongeli does not warn the researcher when he says that: “in terms of the gap between scholarly knowledge and vulgar knowledge, it is necessary to avoid falling into scientism by recognizing no value to the so-called spontaneous knowledge that would be full of illusions and conferring a value of absolute truth to scientific knowledge that would contain only accuracies (...) it must be noted that an allegedly scholarly knowledge, when developed from the truncated premises, may prove less reliable than a spontaneous knowledge built from secular experiments” [8].

Scientific practice must even be inspired by the ordinary knowledge of which the so-called scientific should emerge. In reality, ordinary knowledge and scientific knowledge are seldom antinomic. This reality therefore imposes on the practitioners of the social sciences the need to rethink the development approaches.

### 2.3. Rethink of Development Approaches

The hope of the social sciences is that they produce knowledge and knowledge of practical social use. The development of a theoretical basis for these sciences must be based on indigenous and local modes of production and social creation. The practical knowledge must thus be a prerequisite for any theoretical development of the social sciences, which must allow to produce necessarily scientific knowledge in order to induce social transformations and boost the development of a particular company.

There should be a match between school and development practice that guarantees social well-being while preserving the existing environment. René Dumont even recommends to rethink school, executives and institutions. For him, it is necessary to fight against this form of formation that obliges the young African to “detach from his original world” but to train him so that he can actually make progress in the technical and economic order of the whole planet.

Since the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the 21st century, development policies are increasingly geared towards the rural sector. In black Africa, the return to the village is more of a social necessity for the survival of the entire nation than a simple rural development policy which would, in turn, induce national development. Many rural development projects are multiplying and agricultural modernization processes are underway: the rural is under construction. But the problem in this type of business says G. Belloncle is to “break with the current methods of popularization which, by addressing almost exclusively to the most affluent peasants (the famous pilot peasants), literally take the traditional society to rebush-fur” [9]. In this perspective, the re-

search-action-development (RAD) approach can be effective in that it promotes a participatory method through which rural communities, with the support of researchers can define their model of development and the means of its implementation.

The work of A-M. Hochet are instructive for this purpose, especially those written in collaboration with N'gar Aliba. The research "is in constant interrelationship with the action. Any decision is the result of a search and any result calls for an analysis". Scientific production must require practitioners in the social sciences, a transversal approach that encompasses a multitude of disciplines in order to initiate all aspects of the problem and to find definitive solutions. Once again, pluridisciplinarity is required.

For the development of rural communities, it is necessary not only to dwell in the replacement of methods and strategies. But, we must stop the moment of reflection to seek viable solutions.

### **3. Use of Social Science Research in Rural African Communities**

Social science research is very delicate because it has to understand the social reality that is still fluctuating. Its importance stems from its ability to be useful in the crises and profound changes that the African communities are experiencing today. Whether it is basic research or action research, the social science approach, joining the African people in its creative environment and its space of innovation, must have the purpose, the practical social usefulness of its results of research.

#### **3.1. Identify Places of Creation and Indigenous Knowledge**

There is a requirement for the African Social Sciences: to join the African man in his arrears of invention to revitalize endogenous creativity [10]. Already in the years 1994, J. M. ELA wondered about this in these words "to join the African man in the places of life where he produces innovation, should not take into account all initiatives, strategies and techniques, by which society is created, far from the myths of an irremediably condemned and damned Africa that plunges into Western history?" [11] This is to reverse the trend that Africa is presented in the negative to present it as it is: a vibrant and ambiguous continent. This company can only succeed by a scientific research citizen.

##### **3.1.1. Social Science Challenges for the Future of Rural Communities**

The trap to which the African social sciences could not escape and in which they even fell is that of not making a brutal break with the so-called colonial social sciences. African social scientists have continued to look at African societies with "Western glasses". The African social sciences must emerge from the prison of paradigms, methodologies and themes imported from the West, a former cultural metropolis in order to carry out useful research for the future of Africa.

The other trap and not the least in which the African social sciences have fallen, is that of bureaucratization. The current challenge is therefore to make the social sciences free from any bureaucratic tendency, *i.e.* to liberate them from politico-administrative aureoles.

### **3.1.2. Releasing Science from Administrative or Political Aureoles**

African social scientists have sometimes reduced themselves to mere purveyors of “reason to dominate” the supporters of power. Many of their research aims to justify or even to sing the praise of the power in place. They make a kind of functionalist sociology that is to say works that go only to the place of those whose status quo consolidate their position. They thus seek by their work to attract the “benefactors” of the rulers for any nomination or privileges. They are incapable of any scientific criticism, which alone is capable of generating social change. They discovered their vocation well, but they betrayed it as Frantz says, each generation discovers its vocation, it accomplishes it or betrays it. The production of a scientific discourse is no longer part of their concern. These researchers are confined to the “structures of jests”, “juicy spaces” in which they are infused and where the dictatorship of bureaucracy dictates the logic and axes of their research. But a researcher who is not free is not useful. It may even prove to be dangerous for the society.

## **3.2. Ascientific Researchers**

The Ascientific researchers contain men and women of science who, in their careers, do not produce any scientific work. They are luring in intellectual idleness; and their scientific immobilism closes by an unproductive bureaucratization is only equal to the lack of scientific enthusiasm which they testify.

### **3.2.1. Intellectual Idleness**

African social scientists are increasingly complying with the office trend that dominates the African mentality; according to the popular African conception, is considered “someone who has succeeded his life, the one who is behind an air-conditioned administrative office”. They are not met in the field or in the libraries, but behind administrative offices that do activities that do not most often fit with their domain. It is not surprising to see the latter not producing any scientific documents after several years. But a researcher who does not produce a scientific discourse on social reality is not one. This is not only observed at the individual level but also at the level of the “body of researchers” itself. In Cameroon, we rarely hear about colloquiums that can allow researchers to exchange experiences or even to confront research results. They see themselves as ordinary civil servants and show a lack of scientific enthusiasm. This attitude corrupts heuristics and plunges African research into an abyss of a-science.

### **3.2.2. Lack of Scientific Enthusiasm**

Enthusiasm is a central stimulus to any scientific mind. Descartes quoted by ELA said: “it is a sign of mediocrity that to be devoid of enthusiasm (...) enthu-

siasm is in search of the material truth what faith is to the spiritual truth: one can only reach either only on condition of being enthusiastic or believing”. In sub-Saharan Africa, researchers are grossly inclined to justify their lack of scientific enthusiasm by the low funding allocated to research. However, M. Akam’s work on scientific research in Cameroon muted this position: “we did a comparative analysis between colonial and postcolonial research up to the period ONAREST (1980) characterized by very little funds allocated to social science research and the period from 1981 to 1985 or huge funds were allocated to research (...). This analysis shows ostensibly that (...). The ONAREST (...) paradoxically carried out quantitative and qualitative work with a very low research funding” [12]. The less funding than other concerns causes the problem of scientific production; particularly raised by extra scientific concerns. Obviously, they are more motivated by the acquisition of an administrative post, the desire for a promotion, in short by extra scientific aims than the scientific production itself. It is therefore necessary at this level, as J-M ELA suggests, to make the development of the mentality of African researchers prone to the acquisition of administrative positions.

### **3.3. Develop Scientific Production Structures**

The main blockade on scientific production in Africa remains the almost non-existent presence of publication structures and the absence of a policy of knowledge production. Analyzing the State of research in Cameroonian universities, M. Akam said: “we must know how to finance the willingness to know who is confronted with a genocidal intellectual problem of the non-production of books at home (...) It is not possible to speak of research without an autonomous and independent publication structure that guarantees freedom of expression”.

The challenges in the field of publishing structures and control of their production are enormous in Africa. In Chad, for example, the situation still more dramatic and tends to a scientific tragedy. Indeed, the Chadian intelligentsia does not find competent structures of scientific production within which knowledge can occur easily. The few buildings (Al-Mouna Centre, Sao editions, CEFOD, etc.) that play this role have limited production and consumption and are almost exclusively condensed at the national level (in fact centralized at the level of the only capital N’Djamena in view of the absence of decentralized distribution and focal sale points in other cities of the country or in countries of the sub-region).

The challenge will be, and we’ll never say it enough, to equip our countries with production structures that allow the emergence of African scientific genius inspired by various historicities capable of positioning themselves as a forum for the production of socio-knowledge heard as knowledge and practical knowledge to the services of citizens in the sense of Motaze Akam. Clearly, that one is not mistaken, such a promotion would be effective only from the moment when the

African researcher would also enjoy a certain freedom of expression and opinion. The climate of the current African States determined by hostility towards the social scientist does not guarantee a scientific production which, in most cases, is taxed by the ruling classes of “disruptive” writings and the troublemakers Disorders. Abdoulaye Wade, former President of the Republic of Senegal, said: “it is hard to recognize, alas, that Africa is the greatest waste of brains, either because they are poorly used or because they are not used at all” [13] Even worse, there is a kind of pogrom of the thinking heads organized by the national feudal. Many prominent African thinkers are forced into exile. One example is the Cameroonian sociologist Jean-Marc ELA, who was forced to go in exile and died in 2008, from the Chadian Professor Balaam Facho who left the country since 2008. The list is not exhaustive.

#### **4. Plea for a Citizenship of Research in Sub-Saharan Africa**

If in the previous point we talked about the challenges of social science research and the benefit that Africa would gain by having the right publication structures, we need to make two clarifications in this part before continuing our reflection: firstly, it takes an African search (understood by this as a work that is more the work of African writers themselves), and secondly, it would take to this research a nesting to the reality in its current crisis, in its political tendencies, in its contradictions, in its modernity and its struggles (rural development projects, hydro agricultural installations, modernization, etc.), in short in all its components so that that it induces societies towards positive social transformations and progress. Our advocacy for the citizenship of research [14] in black Africa is a kind of anthropological interpretation that challenges the approach of “dog lovers”.

##### **4.1. Indigenous Research**

A research is said to be indigenous from the moment it focuses on the local problems encountered by a given social group. It must be articulated and conceived on the basis of an endogenous material to specify the construction of a paradigm anchored to indigenous realities. As such, this research must be participatory or more inclusive for the indigenous people; that is to say to produce in concert with this people the knowledge directly usable by the whole society. This is also what Emile Bongeli recommends when he says: “to make research fruitful for the communities, we must focus on the vital problems of our populations, associate them, nor as mere providers of information, but as participants in the elaboration of the knowledge that concerns them in order to enable them to act in full knowledge of the cause in relation to the ideals pursued”.

Moreover, in order to have real social sciences serving the whole rural community in African countries that were once European colonies, it would be necessary to break with the exotic methods of the colonial master, to conceive others more adapted and current to the local reality. Observing the miserabilistic

European vision, Olivier de SARDAN declares that: “at the beginning of colonization, prevailed the idea that African peoples, as” primitive “were driven by profoundly irrational impulses [15]”. Indigenous research requires African researchers to have a severe attempt to “*desethnologisation*” as an approach that undertakes to subtract African societies from European prisms through which they were long perceived as alogical, archaic entities, and therefore a privileged object of Ethnology intended for the study of primitive peoples. The news, but true social sciences in the conception that is ours in this work, must reverse the approach and consider the African rural communities as dynamic and ambivalent entities crossed by contradictions socio-historicists.

African cultures and traditions are the bearers of scientific rationality, and scientific theories can be built to stimulate societal transformations. “The researcher in the humanities and social sciences,” says Jean-Marc ELA, is a primary function in that the “Africanists” can no longer be the exclusive interpreters of African cultures and societies with regard to the rest of the world. By taking up the right of initiative with regard to the look to be made on the African man in society, we must proceed with the decolonization of the social sciences from the transformations of Africa which challenge the analysis grids developed in the “colonial context”. These theories must be intimately linked to local cultures and contexts; they must be the result of making a lifestyle based on the African reality capable of bringing our continent out of the cultural and even technological domination of the great powers that today’s globalization tends to impose on us. The African social sciences must think of the future and even the coming of African societies.

In the same way that Asians, mainly Bhutanese have refused the European economist concept of Gross National Product (GNP) to forge that of Brut National Happiness (NBH), Africans also need to find a model of development inspired by their experiences, their social reality.

#### **4.2. Produce Knowledge Capable of Inducing Societal Transformations**

A science that will not have the purpose of producing practical and useful knowledge and inducing social transformations is a luxury that African social scientists should not be able to afford at the present time. The African social scientists must, by problematizing the problems of Africa, produce knowledge capable of stimulating social transformations, real socio-knowledge dear to the sociology of the fight of Motaze Akam. For this author, socio-knowledge is “knowledge or practical knowledge that our research must produce to find permanent solutions to an Africa persistent crises and permanent adjustments”. To the Congolese sociologist, Emile Bongeli to say that “to be useful, any research must be motivated by the desire to know more to do better”. Thus, the practice of social sciences is inextricably linked to the production of knowledge, to their popularization.

Producing knowledge capable of inducing societal transformations goes through the rehabilitation of local knowledge in the sphere of scientific research. Local knowledge is to be heard here, the secular acquaintances transmitted in forms of Habitus peculiar to a group. Social Sciences should not ignore local knowledge, infantilize it, but integrate it into a process of social innovations where the creative genius of the “world below” would not be on the margins of the fields of production and scientific rationality.

## 5. Conclusion

African rural communities have experienced many development operations since the years 1960 to the present day, most of which have resulted in beating failures. The cause of these failures lies on one hand, in the mismatch between development policies and local realities and, on the other hand, in the lack of efficiency of the scientific productions of African and Africanist researchers in sub-Saharan Africa. All science is culturalist and African cultures are just as much as the so-called Western ones carrying scientific rationality. That is said, the alternative to this problem lies in the citizenship of scientific research in sub-Saharan Africa. African researchers must join the African man in his creations to produce indigenous scientific knowledge capable of inducing societal transformations. “Such a dynamic, as Motaze Akam reminds us, would leave the world from below.”

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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