

Resistance of Local Actors to the Leasing of Water Supply in the Village of Atchannou in South-West Benin

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ABSTRACT

Leasing as an innovation in the governance of the Village Water Supply System (VWSS) should, *a priori*, allow local authorities to manage the delivery of drinking water to rural populations in Benin rationally and transparently. However, instead of being favourably welcomed, this system has met with resistance from local actors. Based on the premise that leasing involves issues that are insufficiently elucidated by its innovators, this article analyses the causes of the resistance observed in its implementation. To achieve this goal, a qualitative social science research method was used, favouring discussion with 18 participants. The data were analysed in the backdrop of the market mode of local governance and fuzzy set theory. The results of this research show that the populations of Atchannou Village do not fully accept the leasing of water, or at least they set out the preconditions to be met by the local government authorities before this innovative approach to governance of the water point can become operational: guaranteeing the management of the funds from the sale of water (1), and repaying the debts related to the community management of the water supply (2). The local actors are therefore in a logic of preserving the interests that will be generated by the sale of water, which is now retroceded to the Municipality; this further increase their resistance to the leasing of the water supply system.

Keywords: Resistance, local actors, leasing, village water supply system, Atchannou village, Athiémé Municipality.

INTRODUCTION

According to the exploratory interviews, the implementation of the Village Water Supply System (VWSS, henceforth) began before 1990, the year in which Benin achieved a democratic renewal. Indeed, the "water point"¹ in Atchannou Village that is the subject of attention in this

¹According to the exploratory interviews, the populations of the village of Atchannou started to contribute financially to the construction of the VWS in 1986. This financial mobilisation of the stakeholders of the village of Atchannou associated with the support of the Beninese State facilitated the construction of the VWS in 1987. In a pragmatic way,

study was built in 1987. The management of most of the water points built in rural areas in the Republic of Benin before and after 1990 was given to the communities. R. Clément (2008) observes that « In rural water supply programmes, the management and maintenance of water facilities are frequently entrusted to village management committees ». Placing this approach in the participatory paradigm, S. Jaglin (2002, p. 4) writes:

In contrast to a tradition in which public authorities provided their citizens with the services necessary for collective life based on a standardised offer, recent reforms of public services and their regulatory systems bear witness to the importance now attached to users. In the face of a widespread loss of confidence in the political system, and in particular, in public service delivery systems, it is hoped that this participation will help to 'wake up' a disillusioned public.

The communities, through the Management Committees (CoGes), made up of « normally a president, a treasurer, a fountain attendant, a repairman and two "sanitary animators" or "hygienists" [...] in charge of the maintenance of the water point and its surroundings » (J.P. Olivier de Sardan and A. E. Dagobi, 2000, p.162), should be in charge of selling the water and the funds mobilised would be used for the maintenance of the waterworks or the construction of other socio-community facilities as indicated by H. Valette, F. Gangneron, and A. Bonnassieux (2016, p.132): « [...] under community management, water revenues were frequently mobilised to participate in local collective actions, such as the construction of classrooms [...] ». This community management of village water supply will gradually come to an end due to the requirements of decentralisation, which took place in Benin in 2003 with the election of the first municipality councillors. Indeed, in the context of decentralisation, H. Valette, F. Gangneron, and A. Bonnassieux write, the Municipalities become the owners of the hydraulic works. They are responsible for the organisation of water distribution (law n°97-029), which was previously a ministerial prerogative. The Ministry of Water must accompany and assist them in this mission. The decentralisation reforms and the second national rural water strategy of 2005 maintain the principle of community participation established by the demand-driven approach for requests to build and rehabilitate water points. However, this aspect will disappear from the guiding principles of the SNAEP updated in 2013 in favour of the Municipalities, which are now responsible for planning activities for the works [...] (Ibid., 2016, p.122).

This statement confirms that the Beninese State, through decentralisation, obliges the management committees to retrocede the governance of the Village Water supply Schemes to the local communities; the idea is to allow the Athiémé Local Government to commodify the delivery of public services at the local level, notably access to drinking water in order to mobilise financial resources to be used for the development of the Municipalities. We can therefore see that one of the logics structuring the retrocession of VWSS to Municipalities is merchandising, an analysis put forward by a researcher for whom decentralisation has « [...] opened up a whole range of commercial delivery of goods and services under the responsibility of the communes: public service management, public service delegations, concessions [...] » (J. P. Olivier de Sardan, 2009, p.29). Reforms in the rural drinking water sector are therefore in

the people of Atchannou village started to enjoy the water of this hydraulic work on Wednesday, May 11, 1987, the day of the death of a veteran called Amoussouké.

line with the "market referential"² of water (C. Baron and M. Maillefert, 2011, cited by H. Valette, F. Gangneron, A. Bonnassieux, 2016, p.113). To some extent, it could be said that the leasing system of water supply would « improve the transparency and accountability of public authorities to their populations » (J. Ribot, 2007) in rural drinking water management. The issue of transparency is crucial as the main characteristic of village pump management is non-transparency. This opacity obviously leads to a permanent suspicion of embezzlement, which is all the more serious because of the acute nature of village quarrels. The accusation of having "eaten" the fund is systematically used by one side against the other, and often the probability of embezzlement weighs at least as much on the accusers as on the accused. [In management, honour, humiliation, mistrust, shame, suspicion and rumour are all widely used in village manoeuvres. [...]. This "space of suspicion" is all the more cumbersome as everyone makes his or her own estimates, and many believe, rightly or wrongly, that the drilling "pays" far more than the sums found in the till when repairs are needed' (J. P. Olivier de Sardan and A. E. Dagobi, 2000, pp. 164-165).

Based on the observations and analyses made by these authors on the management of village water supply, we can say that leasing would be one of the answers to the opacity that characterises the community management of drinking water; this not only could avoid suspicions but also conflicts. In this context, the policy of retrocession of village water supply to local communities should be fully accepted by the rural populations. However, this is not the case in the field under investigation. The exploratory interviews showed that the local actors in the village of Atchannou do not refuse to hand over the management of the water supply to the Municipality. However, this does not mean that leasing does not bring about « resistance and controversy » (H. Valette, F. Gangneron, A. Bonnassieux, 2016, p.113) in its implementation. For these authors, « the communes were often in conflict with local notables and users during the reform of the sector » (Ibid, p.132). In other words, reforms in village water management « sometimes lead to contradictions and blockages [...] » (R. Clément, 2008, p.7). The resistance of local actors in the village of Atchannou is part of this configuration of village water governance described by these authors. This article attempts to shed light on the logics that structure resistance to the leasing of water supply in the village. This exercise is possible thanks to the application of a methodological approach.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND THEORETICAL MODELS

Methodological approach

To gain an in-depth understanding of the logic underlying the resistance of the populations of the village of Atchannou to the leasing policy put forward in all the communes of Benin as a result of decentralisation, the qualitative methods of social science research have been used. This methodological choice has allowed for participatory observation and interviews. As regards the participatory observation, being from the community and therefore having a "double status"³, we were able to take part in certain sessions related to village water management. Considered as a local executive, we were even asked, in this capacity, not only by

²The market system is characterised by many principles: (1) the decentralisation of competencies to the municipalities; (2) the delegation of the management of the water service to private operators; (3) the pricing of water and its systematic payment by volume; and (4) the participation of the stakeholders in water management. (H. Valette, F. Gangneron and A. Bonnassieux, 2016, p.113).

³Researcher (1) and Secretary-General of the Atchannou Village Youth Association.

one of the agents of the Athiémé Municipality but also by the Chief of the Atchannou District, to bring the strategic groups of the village of Atchannou to fully adhere to the leasing of the water point instead of blocking it. As for the interviews, we were able to talk to 18 respondents selected using a reasoned choice. The data from the discussions with the informants were processed using the content analysis and triangulation method. The information from the observation consists of a few descriptive elements and, above all, of photographs that are presented and commented on.

Theoretical models

The results were analysed using the market mode of local governance and Fuzzy Set Theory. The market mode of local governance put forward by J. P. Olivier de Sardan (2009) refers to the monetisation of the provision of public services at the local government level, notably health, education, water, etc. Applied to the present research, the market mode of governance clearly indicates the sale of drinking water in rural areas. This model of analysis is relevant to this research in that the logic underlying the leasing of village water supply is in accordance with the pronouncement of some scholars who have put forward the concept of "market reference system" « [...] characterised by [...] the delegation of the management of the water service to private operators, [...] the pricing of water, its systematic payment by volume, and [...] the participation of the stakeholders in the management of water » (H. Valette, F. Gangneron, and A. Bonnassieux, 2016, p.113). To fully understand the reasons for the resistance of local actors to the policy of leasing drinking water, we resort to J. P. Jacob's (2009, p.184-185) "Fuzzy Set Theory" of which, according to the author, refers to « [...] the approximate, the absence of explanation of divergent interests but which do not appear as such until they have been expressed [...] ». This concept of "fuzzy set theory", highlighted by the author in his work on land management in rural areas, is in alignment with the central issue of this study in which it is postulated that the issues at stake in leasing are insufficiently elucidated to local actors by its innovators (local elected officials in charge of delegating the hydraulic works, the farmer, technical and financial partners, etc.).

RESULTS

The results are structured in six main points: the preparation of leasing (1), leasing (2), the political logic of leasing (3), the causes of resistance to leasing by local actors (4), the manifestations of resistance to leasing (5), and the consequences of resistance to leasing (6).

Preparation for leasing in the village of Atchannou

Since the construction of the water tower in the village of Atchannou contributed to the implementation of the leasing policy, it could be said that this paradigm of water governance at the local level began timidly in 2000. Indeed, on the initiative of an international civil servant from the village of Atchannou, a team⁴ from the village contacted the Lokossa water department in 2000-2001 to discuss the construction of the water tower. This led to the payment of one million, five hundred thousand (1,500,000) CFA francs as a financial participation fee required by GIZ, an international non-governmental organisation that is implementing the water tower

⁴The idea of building the water tower came from the enlightened people of Atchannou village. They felt that a modern system of water distribution within the community should be beneficial to the entire population.

construction project. The villagers, through "community management"⁵, were able to mobilise five hundred thousand (500,000) FCFA. This money was supplemented by a son of the village of Atchannou with one million (1,000,000) CFA francs, which made it possible to mobilise the financial participation (1,500,000 CFA francs) required by the GIZ. The satisfaction of this economic requirement led to the construction of the water tower at the beginning of 2009 as well as the realization of the standpipes that connect all the other villages of the Atchannou District (Tadokomey, Akonana, Konouhoué, etc.). Photos 1 and 2 show the configuration of the drinking water distribution system in Atchannou village.



Photo 1, a long shot picture, shows the water tower of the village of Atchannou. The building in front of the tower is the former maternity hospital of the village. The road along the fence of the former maternity hospital leads from Athiémé to Grand-Popo. The installation of the water extension is made at the edge of this road in order to serve the villages such as Tadokomey, Akonana, Konouhoué, Hounkpon, etc. with drinking water. This water tower, instead of serving only the village of Atchannou (it is only this village that contributed financially to its construction) benefits the other villages because of its retrocession to the Municipality of Athiémé.

Photo 1: Water tower in Atchannou village.

Source: Photo by Togbé Codjo Timothée, Atchannou, 04/10/2019.

⁵Community management involves the sale of water from the VWS by the communities through a management committee.



Photo 2 shows a Fountain Point (FP). This is where people have to come to buy drinking water. This fountain point is located in Dékanmey district, opposite the former dispensary of the village of Atchannou. The fence to the right of the water point is one of the boundaries of the dispensary. This FP is not working at the time of this research.

Photo 2: Water tower in Atchannou village.

Source: Cliché Togbé Codjo Timothée, Atchannou, 04/10/2019.

At the end of the construction of the water tower and standpipes, the Mayor of Athiémé sent a delegation led by his First Deputy in January 2010 to explain to the people of the village of Atchannou the retrocession of water management to the Municipality, thus preparing for a dispossession of the management committee from the control of the sale of water and the maintenance of the water supply system. The population did not openly express their disagreement with the decision of the Mayor's office to take over the water management. However, they demanded the repayment of the money invested by the village in the construction of the tower as well as the debts incurred for the execution of certain works; this seems to be understood and accepted by the delegation from the Mayor's office according to the statement of a local actor : « They promised before the wise men the repayment of the village's debts at the end of 2010 » (A.V., member of the association for the development of the village of Atchannou, 05/10/19). This oral commitment made by the Athiémé Local Government delegation to the people of Atchannou village gave a slight opening to the leasing.

Leasing

One of the acts that confirm the leasing is the concretisation of the "forced retrocession" of the management of the Atchannou village water supply to the Athiémé Town Hall. The expression "forced retrocession" is used here to show that the town hall had to force its way in to take the management of the water supply out of the hands of the members of the management committee and entrust it to a farmer, as one informant put it:

They promised in front of the elders to pay back the debts at the end of 2010. But they have not paid up to now. They started looking for farmers. First, they looked for a farmer among us. In 2011, the Municipality found a farmer following a call for tender and they came to **snatch**⁶ the

⁶We have put this word in bold to emphasise the forced nature of the handover of water to the Municipality. It also means that the population did not fully agree to hand over the water to the Municipality.

water management from us. The farmer recruited some villagers on the standpipes and they started selling (Member of the Village Development Association, Atchannou, 05/10/19).

This statement shows that the leasing of the water supply became a reality in 2011. Positioning itself as the main actor in the governance of drinking water in rural areas due to decentralisation coupled with the transfer of certain prerogatives, the Athiémé Municipality recruited a farmer⁷ and had him sign a contract. This contract-driven context is well specified by H. Valette, F. Gangneron and A. Bonnassieux (2016, p. 122) when they write that « [...] "complex works" must [...] be the subject of a contract between the Municipality and a delegate ». In the vain, it is confirmed by a researcher that water management in rural areas « is achieved through contracts signed between an operator in charge of management and the municipality, the owner of the works » (C. Baron and M. Maillefert, 2011). The leasing of village water supply has very specific logic that must be highlighted.

Political Logic behind the Leasing

The political logics of the leasing of village water supply highlighted in the scientific literature revolve around efficiency (1), the deployment of new competencies (2), the strengthening of local autonomy (3), and the generation of new financial resources (4). These logics stem from the following pronouncement:

The third principle concerns the delegation of water management to a private operator, an operator supposedly more efficient than a public operator or a community of users. Delegated management is supposed to provide the efficiency that would be lacking in the public or community management model. It would make it possible to deploy new competences, strengthen local autonomy and generate new financial resources for local authorities through the levying of taxes on water (H. Valette, F. Gangneron, A. Bonnassieux, 2016, p. 120).

In the context of this research, the logic of generating new financial resources for the Municipality of Athiémé is prioritised. The data from the interviews show that the commune of Athiémé is relatively poor due to its geographical location, which makes it an administrative entity that is often plagued by floods. There are therefore no economic activities on which the Municipality could levy taxes to meet certain needs of the population (construction and maintenance of rural roads, for example). In this context, the commodification of public services in order to capture rents, particularly the sale of drinking water in rural areas, is welcome. The words of a political actor on the issue confirm this analysis:

[...] our Municipality does not have resources that can bring in money. We are in a very poor Municipality. We also do not have companies that will allow us to collect taxes in order to mobilise our own financial resources. Faced with this situation, we are obliged to control the sale of water in the villages. This will allow us to find some money for the development of the Municipality. People of Atchannou do not want to understand this. It is the Athiémé local

⁷The farmer is responsible for the distribution, operation and maintenance of the network, while the municipality retains the prerogatives of infrastructure renewal and network extensions. The farmer hires an operator responsible for maintaining the network and regularly collecting revenue from the village water supply (H. Valette, F. Gangneron, A. Bonnassieux (2016).

government that has the power to sell water, not the communities [...] (Local politician, Athiémé, 10/10/2019).

These comments by the informant show that the logic of mobilising financial resources determines the policy of leasing the village water supply in Atchannou. In addition to this reasoning, the logic of marking the space power of the Municipality is also expressed: « [...] People of Atchannou do not want to understand this. It is the Municipality that has the power to sell water, not the communities [...] ». This would mean that if the people of Atchannou understood that it is the authorities that have the power to sell their water, they would not resist the implementation of the leasing. What are the rationales behind the resistance of the people of Atchannou village to the leasing of water supply?

Causes of local actors' resistance to leasing

Several local rationales could be used to explain the resistance of local actors to the leasing of village water supply. In this case, four rationales were identified, namely:

- leasing, a political mechanism for expropriating the community's public property (1) ;
- leasing, a "fuzzy" market (2);
- leasing, an instrument of double standards (3);
- leasing, a hindrance to village local development actions (4).

Leasing, a political mechanism for expropriating the community's public property

If we look at the evolution of drinking water in the village of Atchannou from 1987 to 2009, it is easy to see that the populations have been upstream and downstream of this trend. In other words, they participated financially in the construction of the VWSS in 1987 as well as in the construction of the water tower in 2009. They have therefore appropriated the village's water as their property and their thing. This is reflected in the installation of a water management committee recognised by the Beninese government, which is responsible for the selling of this resource, repairing the hydraulic equipment, etc. Though community management is subject to criticism and sometimes to conflict, it confirms to some extent that water belongs to the communities to which the hydraulic works were built. In this context, the control of water management by the Athiémé Local government is perceived and interpreted by the people of Atchannou as an expropriation of the community's public property and they do not accept it. A participant asserted:

I don't know why it is our water that interests the Athiémé Municipality. We contributed money to build the first water point. We also contributed to the construction of the water tower. The other villages in the Atchannou district also have water. The water in our village is for us. We have the right to manage our water. But the Mayor has his eyes on our water and wants to take it away from us [...]. We don't agree with this. The Municipality will not take our water easily (A.S., member of the village development association, 07/10/2019).

The assertion of this participant positions the water supply as an exclusive property of the populations of Atchannou village. From this point of view, the leasing is perceived and experienced as a policy of dispossession of the rural populations of the property that belongs to them, a policy that would be intentionally created by Athiémé Local Government. In this context, one might ask whether the leasing has been sufficiently explained to the people of Atchannou village.

Leasing, a "fuzzy" market

According to the data collected from local actors, the leasing of VWSS was not sufficiently explained to people of Atchannou before its implementation, which makes this policy a "vague" market. Speeches such as « [...] the First Deputy Mayor came to tell us that from now on it is the Municipality that will manage the water in our village. We were there when a farmer came and recruited young people of the village to sell it. We can no longer understand anything » (A.V., Atchannou, 05/10/2019), « [...] the Athiémé Local Government sold the water sales system to a farmer through a call for tender. He was therefore entrusted with the water for sale. And he, in turn, put salesmen at each standpipe [...] the funds are paid to the Municipality » (A senior village official, 12/10/2019). This shows that leasing is understood differently by the people. This situation only fuels the "vagueness" of this policy surrounding the management of village water supplies. The ambiguity derived from the leasing system interpretation or its lack of understanding legitimises the resistance to it by local actors in the village of Atchannou. The "vagueness" embedded in the leasing system is further reinforced by the fact that it is only the water of the village of Atchannou that is subject to this policy in the District.

Leasing, a "double standard"

People of Atchannou perceive the leasing system as an instrument of double standards when we refer to what they said:

We wonder if it is only our water that the Municipality has seen. The other villages in the Atchannou District also have water points. Why didn't the Municipality take their water? The "village of Tadokomey"⁸ for example continues to sell its water and keep the money from the sale of water. Why don't we continue to sell our water and manage the water money to take care of our village? As long as other villages continue to manage their water, we will oppose the decision of the Municipality to take our water. This is an injustice. We will not accept (A.G., former president of the water management committee, Atchannou, 05/10/2019).

These assertions show that leasing contributes to the creation of social and economic injustice in the management of village water supplies. This injustice is said to be linked to the unconsidered and/or forced implementation of the leasing policy. In an administrative entity (Atchannou District) where the villages have and enjoy the same public good (VWSS), it would be interesting if the securing of the rights of each village were taken into account in the implementation of a public policy (leasing) coming from above (State via the Municipality). The opposite approach creates injustices and therefore double standards, as expressed by the people of Atchannou. Insofar as one of the villages (Tadokomey, for example) continues to sell its water and keep the money, it would be difficult for another village to accept that the state should come and take the money for it, as is the case in Atchannou. In any case, this policy of governance of public services without a thorough analysis could cause damage to the villages that will be subjected to it.

Leasing as an obstacle to local development actions in the village of Atchannou

Considered by people of Atchannou as an obstacle to the development of their community, the leasing of village water supplies meets with resistance. In fact, several development actions in

⁸This village is located at about 200 m from the village of Atchannou. It is Atchannou B when referring to the names of the public primary schools in both villages.

this village have been carried out thanks to the sale of water, as an informant committed to sabotaging the implementation of the leasing scheme states:

The development of our village is partly through the sale of this water. I can't say everything here. But I know that thanks to the sale of this water, endogenous sacrifices have been made for the proper functioning of the village market. The money from the water has enabled us to contribute financially to the construction of a classroom module at the village's public primary school. Through the sale of water, we contributed to the construction of the village health centre. The sale of water also enabled us to find land for the construction of the district police station, which is currently being negotiated. The sale of water has given us the opportunity to spend money to bring in 'Benin National Electrical Power (SBEE)' agents to repair the public lighting. It will not be easy for the Municipality to take our water. Who will help us to participate financially in the development of the village? What has the Municipality already done for our village? (A.S., member of the village development association, Atchannou, 05/10/2019).

The statements of this participant show that community water management is at the centre of all development initiatives that require money in Atchannou village. Losing control over the sale of water is therefore mortgaging the development of Atchannou village. Some of the achievements made thanks to the sale of water are shown in photos 3 and 4.



Photo 3 shows the health centre in the village of Atchannou. The land on which this public service is built was bought with money from the sale of water and donated to the Beninese State. A common problem in villages is the availability of land for utilities. The sale of water has played a decisive role in this respect in the village of Atchannou.

Photo 3: Atchannou village health centre.

Source: Cliché Togbé Codjo Timothée, Atchannou, 04/10/2019.



Photo 4 shows a one-hectare estate purchased with money from the sale of water. This space is intended for public services that the Beninese State and non-governmental organisations would bring to the village of Atchannou. Moreover, the Atchannou district police station has already found a place here for its construction, which is currently being negotiated.

Photo 4: Atchannou village health centre.

Source: Cliché Togbé Codjo Timothée, Atchannou, 04/10/2019.

In view of the achievements made, it is easy to say that water supply occupies an important place in the development of the village of Atchannou. In this context, resistance to leasing could find social legitimacy.

Manifestations of resistance to leasing

The empirical data allow us to present two remarkable forms of resistance to leasing by people of the village of Atchannou: the destruction of the waterworks (1), and the U-turn imposed on the mayor and his delegation during a visit (2).

Destruction of the hydraulic structure

The cross-checking of the information collected from the different social categories shows that the sale of water under the leasing system did not last long (about 6 months) and then the management went wrong; thus, putting the farmer and the Municipality in conflict. Indeed, the farmer in charge of the leasing should pay money to the Municipality at the end of each month. It turns out that the farmer was unable to honour this commitment because of the misappropriation of funds by the fountain workers. To meet the commitments made to the Municipality, the farmer summoned the operator to the Athiémé police station in October 2013, where he was held in custody. The latter was released on the third day following the repayment of 120,000 CFA francs by one of the watermen he was supervising. In the settlement of this conflict at the heart of the leasing system, the farmer withdrew, thus abandoning the water tower which had already broken down due to the poor management that structures the leasing system. In this situation of the farmer's withdrawal, the Municipality decided to close the water tower. In order to conceal its decision, it sent the NGO PROTOS to explain to the population that it is because they refuse to buy water that the water system supply will be closed. PROTOS, in complicity with the Municipality, managed to stop water provision. As a result of this blockage, the village of Atchannou remained without drinking water for at least three (3) months. A delegation of village officials went to explain the inaccessibility of drinking water to the Commissioner so that he would intervene with the Mayor of Athiémé to resolve the crisis. The elders, the young people and the District Chief of Atchannou approached the Mayor with the same problem. But he did not meet this crucial demand of the people who are now without drinking water. While waiting for the reopening of the water tower, the local actors have returned to some old practices of drinking water supply. Indeed, the population had fallen back on the water from wells, streams and backwaters. Moreover, overwhelmed by the situation and motivated by the ambition to avoid the same difficulty for students during the start of the 2013-2014 academic year, the young people of the village of Atchannou destroyed part of the water tower's supply system in October 2013, thus creating free access to the water point.

The U-turn imposed on the Local Government chairman and his delegation during a visit

According to the mainstream discourse of the informants, the Mayor, accompanied by a team, came to the village of Atchannou a few days after the destruction of the waterworks by the population. Combining the accumulated discontent (non-payment of village debts before the leasing, deprivation of drinking water, etc.) with his unannounced arrival, people mobilised to chase him and his delegation away during his tour of the waterworks. The pace of this spontaneously organised resistance meant that the Mayor's delegation had to leave the village quickly. The two forms of resistance shown by the people of Atchannou (destruction of the hydraulic structure, the U-turn imposed on the Mayor and his delegation from the water site) are not without consequences.

Consequences of resistance to leasing

There are two major consequences of the people of Atchannou's resistance to the leasing of the village water supply: a tap for the whole village (1) and free access to water (2).

A tap for the whole village

The village water supply system built in Atchannou village in 1987 had eight taps, which reduced queues for users and saved people time. The operationalisation of the leasing of water supply thanks to the construction of the water tower and the multiplication of the standpipes should lead to the availability of several taps. However, the technical breakdowns of the water tower, coupled with the resistance of the population, have meant that the village of Atchannou currently has only one tap, as shown in Photo 5.



This photo, taken with the verbal permission of the people in it, shows the only tap that serves the entire village of Atchannou. This is where the VWSS was built in 1987 with 8 taps. The installation behind the two men pumps water from the Water Supply System to the water tower as indicated by the blue-tinted iron pipes. The plastic pipe at the end of which the man in the blue shirt has positioned his yellow can to collect water is connected to the opening created on the waterworks by the youth of Atchannou after its closure by the Municipality. This closure that lasted

Photo 5: Atchannou village health centre.

Source: Cliché Togbé Codjo Timothée, Atchannou, 04/10/2019.

Free access to water

The water supply system in the village of Atchannou, in a community management approach, was sold. Its delegation to a private operator (a farmer) did not prevent this commodification. However, the resistance of the population to the leasing blocked the sale, thus making free the access to water. This free access⁹ is explained by the withdrawal of the farmer and the refusal of the former management committee to continue selling water.

DISCUSSION

The handover of the water supply in the village of Atchannou to the Athiémé Municipality council was not sufficiently prepared. In other words, people of Atchannou village are not well informed about the issues at stake in the handover, let alone its advantages and disadvantages. This situation has created contradictions which, in the end, have led to resistance to the leasing of the water point. A better explanation of the delegation of the management of the water supply

⁹This will certainly not be able to continue.

to a farmer could lead local actors to accept it which would minimise possible conflicts. This precondition for contracting out was highlighted in the following statement:

[...] it is necessary to define precisely the stakes of the management of the service with the villagers based on their internal functioning, in order to avoid contradictions [...]. Promote an informed debate on the management choices, detailing the advantages and disadvantages of the different options, the functionality of the options chosen in the village socio-political context, and the skills needed to manage the facilities properly (R. Clément, 2008, pp.3-4).

This statement by the author invites politicians to truly involve rural populations in the delegated management of village water supplies. It is therefore crucial to avoid approximation in decision making and lack of explanation of interests as indicated by "Fuzzy Set Theory" (J.P. Jacob, 2009). The "vagueness" maintained in the process of leasing the water supply to the village of Atchannou is partly responsible for the resistance of the population. As we know, one of the logics that structure the leasing is the commodification of public services in rural areas, which refers to the « market model of local governance » (J.-P. Olivier de Sardan, 2009) or the « market referential » (H. Valette *et al*, 2016). Outside this market logic, the use of private operators at the local level to deliver public or collective goods and services most often refers to other types of logic (Op.cit., 2009, p.29). This analysis is in line with the present research when we know that the populations of the village of Atchannou perceive leasing as a policy of confiscation of their property, or rather, as an instrument for blocking the development of the area. These types of logic were highlighted in the following quote:

[...] the leaders of the former Djougou water system supply felt that the process [...] was a confiscation of the works and associated revenue, for the benefit of farmers from outside the villages [...]. However, under community management, water revenues were frequently used to participate in local collective actions, such as the construction of classrooms. Our cross-checking shows that part of the revenue was probably captured by the managers (H. Valette *et al*, 2016, p. 132).

This quotation shows that apart from the commercial logic that characterises the leasing, there is also confiscation, misappropriation of money and blocking of local development actions. As mentioned earlier, the money from the sale of the water supply has contributed to the repair of public lighting, the construction of the water tower, classroom facilities, the health centre, etc. in the village of Atchannou. These actions really contribute to the development of this rural area. We are therefore in a particular context where community management serves the public interest, contrary to the position of certain authors who, in their investigations into the governance of village water supplies in Niger, directly or indirectly consider that community water management does not serve the public interest (J.-P. Olivier de Sardan and A. E. Dagobi, 2000). Because of the "vagueness" of the process of retrocession of the village water supply and the insufficiently explained market logic, the resistance of the actors in the village of Atchannou has social legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

It is postulated in this article that the issues at stake in the leasing of the village water supply system in Atchannou are insufficiently explained to local actors. Based on this conjecture, around which the avenues of analysis have been identified using qualitative methods of research in humanities and social sciences, it emerges that the resistance of the populations is caused by the perception they have of the leasing policy. Indeed, they perceive leasing as a tool

for confiscating a community public good (village water supply), a policy of double standards, and an instrument for blocking the development of their village. The confiscation of a community public good is justified by the fact that the Municipality, through decentralisation, is exercising its legal power of governance over the village water supply, which was built without its financial participation. The policy of "double standards" refers to the practice whereby the Municipality leases only one village water supply out of at least eight built in the Atchannou Local Government. In doing so, it leaves the possibility for other villages to continue community water management and imposes its right to control the water supply of only one village, namely Atchannou. This situation contributes to the creation of social and economic injustices, which cannot be accepted in rural areas where social categories monitor each other in the local development process. The logic of blocking development is relevant when we know that the expropriation of the populations of Atchannou from their common good (water supply) inhibits all local actions. The Association for the Development of the Village of Atchannou relies on the money from the sale of water to undertake activities or to participate financially in certain projects. This hope, which is based on community management of water, is being undermined by the leasing of water. This situation leads to a rethinking of the contract-driven village water supply in order to guarantee not only the development of the concerned villages but also to minimise the conflicts that arise.

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