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Title: Supporting the resilience and self-determination of threatened agroecological territories. The case of the Basse Casamance region in Senegal.

Abstract:

On the margins of agricultural development, certain rural societies have developed surprising forms of resistance in the face of anthropic pressures on the environment and lifestyles, due to the vitality of their cultures and customary institutions (Raskin et al 2010).

Such is the case of the Diola societies that inhabit the Basse Casamance delta in southern Senegal. In an exceptional terroir combining nourishing forests, mangroves and rich rice-growing plains, the diolas have managed to create and maintain a satisfying way of life, based on a complex combination of productive (rice-growing, gathering, fishing, etc.), recreational and spiritual activities (Diatta et al. 2017; Sané et al. 2018). In this society, human-earth relations are governed by robust customary institutions, which regulate access to natural resources and result in respect for all forms of life, human and non-human. These local institutions, coupled with geographical isolation and armed conflict, have probably helped to regulate the intrusion of Industrial Modernity, making Basse Casamance a veritable "agroecological territory". However, climate disruption and the resurgence of new anthropogenic threats have started to undermine these balances (Sané 2017; Dieye et al 2015; Diédhiou & Mering 2019).

PRATAM (French acronym for "Potentials of Resilience and Self-Determination Threatened Agroecological Territories") is a research-action dynamic that brings together academic and non-academic partners, with three objectives: (i) to produce activable knowledge on the functioning of the agroecological territory of Basse-Casamance, its dynamics of change and its mechanisms of resilience; (ii) to contribute to a recognition of the exceptional universal value of the territory, and to a (re)activation of forms of customary resistance; (iii) to launch an academic and socio-political debate on agroecological territories, seen as spaces of resilience, self-determination and even overcoming in the face of the pitfalls of Industrial Modernity (Ringhofer 2009; Haraway 2015). The PRATAM research-action dynamic brings together INRAE, CIRAD, ISRA, the Assane Seck University of Ziguinchor, and the University of Bern. It is supported by the TSARA initiative, the CREATES Centre and the ARTS and ACROPICS projects.

Our presentation will provide a general overview of the agroecological territory of Basse Casamance, focusing on (i) the functioning of traditional agrarian systems, (ii) the customary institutions that frame anthropic practices and human-nature relationships and (iii) the dynamics of change that potentially threaten its stability. We will then present the main objectives of the PRATAM action-research dynamic: key questions, methods, hypotheses and preliminary results from initial exploratory fieldwork.

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