

# **Governance and the construction of accountabilities and moralities in the Atlantic Zone of Costa Rica: a case study of an exemplary extensionist**

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## **Introduction**

As a result of neo-liberal and structural adjustment policies, many developing countries are presently introducing participatory extension approaches in which issues of accountability and empowerment are paramount. Participatory approaches of this kind have been heralded by multilateral institutions such as the World Bank as key vehicles for improving the efficiency of state bureaucracies, for increasing farmers' self-reliance and for making state policies more sustainable, both in ecological and organisational terms. From a sociological perspective, it can be argued that the introduction of participatory extension approaches is an important element in the construction of new types of relations between farmers and the state for the constitution of new types of governance.

This chapter sets out to critically analyse a number of normative assumptions underlying the concept of (good) governance currently employed by many social scientists working from an institutionalist perspective. To assist this analysis, I draw upon post-structuralist insights developed around Foucault's work on governance and on the actor-oriented approach developed in Wageningen under the direction of Norman Long. The argument, in short, is that the strength of the governance concept has been undermined by policy-oriented work aimed at developing prescriptions for 'good governance'. It is also argued that the governance approach could benefit from an ethnographic approach that pays closer attention to the social practices of situated actors.

The chapter begins with a discussion on the concept of governance and proceeds with a case study of an extensionist working for an integrated rural development project in a colonisation area in the Atlantic Zone of Costa Rica. In the conclusion, a number of ideas about the possibilities of integrating institutionalist and actor-oriented approaches are presented.

## Some critical comments on the governance approach

Governance has recently emerged as a powerful new concept in policy arenas and recent theoretical works about state intervention. In opposition to structuralist and instrumentalist views on the state, the governance concept moves away from the idea of the state as being the principal actor in designing and implementing policies and programmes. The practice of government is instead seen as the outcome of a complex set of interactions between different sets of actors. Kooiman (1993:258) thus defines governance as *'the pattern or structure that emerges in a social-political system as the "common" result or outcome of the interacting intervention efforts of all actors involved'*.

The governance approach has been developed as a policy framework for improving the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of state interventions. Governance, in this view, can best be visualised in terms of polycentric institutional arrangements (Ostrom and Wynne, 1993: 177), the idea being that people's organisations are most effective when individuals organise themselves in groups in relation to single or multi-purpose authorities in particular areas. Such polycentric arrangements allow for an effective mix between local indigenous organisations, development organisations and state agencies. The state is viewed as but one actor within a larger constellation of organisations in which manifold contracting relationships can be established (public-private; donor-NGOs; government-NGOs; NGO-Community based organisations; CBO-group/community).

On the basis of these ideas, the notion of 'good governance' has become increasingly popular among multilateral institutions (see the World Bank State of the World Report 1998 dedicated to the state). In this policy context good governance embraces the state, the market and civil society as three different domains of activity, each with its own modes of regulation, set of resources and practices. It also refers to a set of rules and norms that regulate the inter-relationships between these domains in a transparent and accountable way. Hence, the role of the state, rather than being the prime agent of development, is viewed as creating an environment in which the market can regulate economic activity, and where civil society can enable citizens to organise themselves through democratic and transparent organisational forms.

The good governance perspective can be criticised on several grounds. To begin with, the notions employed (accountability and transparency) are not so much analytical concepts that can aid research into the intricacies of administrative and political relations that, by nature, involve a wide range of actors. They are normative concepts contrived by policy-makers. As Long argues,

*'One must avoid accepting uncritically the definitions and assumptions of administrators, planners and politicians. [For] the life-worlds of farmers and other actors are not confined to the spatial and strategic options promoted by policy-makers even when these conceptions acquire a "reality" as powerful instruments for allocating resources and for defining the discourse of policy and analysis'* (Long, 1997: 53; see also Long 1988, 1989).

Thus, if we take the actors' points of view seriously, we should not give preference to any particular set of actors (in this case, policy-makers and

politicians). Furthermore, articles of faith and good intentions should not be confused with real-life programmes of action and their outcomes.

Instead of working with a policy-framework, we need to develop an analytical conceptualisation of governance that enables us to assess and analyse current changes in relationships between farmers, state and non-state institutions. It also needs to analyse the roles played by the idioms and vocabularies of policy-makers in shaping such relationships. To do this, we can draw upon ideas developed by post-structuralists on policy-discourse in order to criticise three notions central to the concept of (good) governance as developed in policy circles: transparency, civil society and accountability.

To begin with, the notion of transparency is problematic since it conceals the fact that relations between policy-makers, politicians and administrators involve multiple hidden agendas (Schaffer, 1984). These hidden agendas are sometimes well established but often still in formulation. Transparency conveys the idea that it is possible to design clear-cut rules and procedures for organisational processes with an optimal degree of openness. These assumptions run counter to the observation that administrative activities involve the emergence of certain pragmatic rules of the game (Bailey, 1969) and forms of practical or tacit knowledge (Giddens, 1984), which resist being made explicit because they are inherently political activities. We therefore need to problematise such normative constructions and view them as elements within policy discourses deployed by policy-makers and administrators for specific purposes (Apthorpe and Gasper, 1996; de Vries, 1997; Grillo, 1997). Furthermore, it can be argued that the notion of transparency is but one of a battery of elements within a wider development apparatus (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1990) aimed at constructing defined visibility through a bureaucratic/institutional optic. Accordingly, in post-structuralist theory transparency is viewed as a discursive technique for opening up a space for intervention in hitherto 'inaccessible' domains of administrative life, hence creating new domains of intervention.

The conceptualisation of a domain of socio-political activity separate from those of the state and the market is also central to notions of good governance. Such a notion of civil society assumes that society is composed of organised individuals and groups who define their interests and commitments as being distinct from that of the state and, accordingly, organise themselves 'autonomously'. Reality, however, is more complex; people organise themselves within a multitude of different domains (the family, community organisations, business enterprises, etc.) constituting defined fields of activity which are underpinned by certain moral notions or values. The artificial separation between state, market and civil society obscures the existence of organising practices which cross-cut the family, community and entrepreneurial domains that enable people to access and combine different sets of material and authoritative resources.

Finally, accountability is a problematic concept since it assumes the existence and possibility of defining a generalised/universal set of moral standards concerning 'good' administration. The point is not so much the lack of mechanisms for holding bureaucracies accountable for their actions, but the fact that these are embedded in idioms, power relations, moralities and practices which are culturally specific and context dependent. Rather than a fixed set of rules and norms, accountability should be seen as tied to particular performances

and settings, such as when farmers make jokes about the incapacity of officials to make good on their promises, thus representing the enactment of forms of popular culture which ridicule authorities (Scott, 1985). Again, from a post-structuralist perspective, accountability can be viewed as an element of policy discourses constituting what Foucault, coining a neologism, has denominated 'governmentality' (Burchell, 1991; Miller and Rose, 1992). Accountability, then, can be viewed as a set of (discursive and non-discursive) techniques aimed at instilling forms of calculation among often distant actors, thus enabling the exercise of power from a distance (Latour, 1987). The engendering of forms of accountability, in this view, is another set of practices by administrators aimed towards rendering the world calculable and predictable by developing modes for governing the conduct of others (Miller and Rose, 1992).

Indeed, the work of Foucault and his followers on technologies of government is useful for researching and analysing the deployment, uses and effects of the discourse and practices of participatory extension methodologies. However, we should not assume that policy-makers are able to impose their agendas on 'distant' actors such as extensionists and farmers through the construction and manipulation of policy discourses. As Long (1997: 54) argues, it is necessary to complement the post-structuralist approach with a detailed examination of how discourses are deployed in particular social arenas, and by giving more attention to issues of strategy and social life. For these reasons, it is important that a methodology is developed for studying social interactions between bureaucrats and farmers by focussing on the encounters that take place between them in various types of social settings. Accordingly, an analytical conceptualisation of governance should concentrate on the construction of accountabilities and moralities both as a result of the deployment and appropriation of policy discourses by different sets of actors and as emergent properties of social interaction between bureaucrats and farmers.

These ideas are explored further with the use of an ethnographic case study concentrating on the social production of moral notions of the 'good extensionist' or the 'good farmer'. The case study also focuses on the production of languages of accountability, whereby bureaucrats and farmers evaluate and assess government programmes and the roles of the various parties involved. The case study demonstrates that such languages of accountability evince mixtures of technocratic policy discourse, focussing on both the skills necessary for rendering financial accounts, and on popular notions and images of social justice.

In 1988-1990, research administrated by the Costa Rican Land Reform Institute (IDA) was conducted in a settlement area (the Neguev Regional Office) in the Atlantic Zone of Costa Rica. Before becoming a settlement Neguev had been a cattle ranch until 1978, when it was invaded by a radical peasant organisation (UPAGRA). After a couple of years of struggle it was purchased by the IDA, which embarked on an ambitious programme to convert peasants and plantation workers into entrepreneurial farmers through the implementation of an integrated rural development project. Not surprisingly, the project was a massive failure because of 'implementation problems' and the difficulties of putting into place an effective 'beneficiary selection system' (de Vries, 1997).

The style of intervention used in the project was most definitely top-down, if not outright repressive. I documented the trajectory of the project interventions in

a previous article (de Vries, 1995) by focussing on a series of interfaces or critical encounters between settler-beneficiaries and IDA front-line workers (extensionists, social workers, land-measurers etc). In the article in question, I set out to show how the life-world of one 'exemplary' extensionist was shaped by a particular technocratic discourse. The discourse was aimed at enhancing institutional performance through the introduction of transparent working procedures (such as a computerised beneficiary selection system); hence minimising the role of clientelistic relations in IDA's functioning. This discourse, however, was appropriated in different ways by institutional managers, regional administrators and the front-line workers in the settlements, giving rise at the local level to highly demeaning and even racist views on the settler population. I argued that the conflictive and contradictory character of the technocratic discourse was reflected in what I call the 'fragmented nature' of this exemplary extensionist's life-world. This had distinct implications for the way in which he developed a code of conduct (or style of operation) for dealing with settlers, colleagues and the institution at large.

Although the research predates the introduction of participatory methodologies in Costa Rica in the 1990's, it can be argued that present relations between extensionists and settlers do not differ substantially from those recorded ten years ago. In fact, as Pacheco (2000) and Zúñiga (1998) show, participatory methodologies of this nature have had little effect in terms of their intended objectives i.e. improving the quality of communication with a view to enabling forms of local-level planning that make possible a more efficient use of scarce resources. On the contrary, the introduction of these methodologies imposed an additional administrative burden for the extensionists, rendering them even more dependent on entrepreneurial actors than before. Subsequently, the use of participatory methodologies in the Ministry of Agriculture has recently been discontinued in view of their lack of effectiveness.

### **A case study of an exemplary *técnico***

At the time of my research, Samuel was one of ten field-level workers representing the Neguev regional office and was in charge of the medicinal plants and pineapple programmes. He comes from San Vito; a coffee producing area in the southern part of the country regarded as being one of the few successful attempts to promote colonisation by Europeans in Costa Rica. His father was a small coffee farmer and cattle holder in this same region. Given this background, Samuel preferred to define himself as a *campesino*. His background, he would argue, was the main reason he preferred to work in the field with smallholders than in the office. Most of the satisfaction he derived from his work came from the appreciation he received from the farmers he worked alongside of.

Samuel was employed at the IDA headquarters in San José and sent to Neguev for the explicit purpose of establishing medicinal plants, spices and dyes programme. This programme, Samuel's first, was initiated in 1982-83 by Alberto Ramos, a former university lecturer of his, who had become the IDA expert in charge of the national medicinal plants programme.

Samuel had done practical work under supervision of Ramos in two Indian reserves in his native province during his studies. Before this, they had collaborated with each other on laboratory work on medicinal plants at the national museum and have continued to maintain very close working relations ever since.

In the Indian reserves, Samuel dedicated himself to collecting and classifying medicinal plants on the basis of the Indians' own indigenous knowledge. He spent fifteen days in each Indian community living with an Indian family. This was an important experience for him and he recalled that,

*'These people are highly reserved and if you want to gain their confidence you have to make a lot of effort. Yet, ultimately I developed a deep appreciation of them and I think they also valued my work'.*

After Samuel graduated from the university, Alberto Ramos made arrangements to get him a job on his medicinal plant programme. This, however, proved to be very difficult and they had to wait until someone known to them was appointed to the Board of Directors before getting the necessary support. He was finally transferred to Neguev in 1984 where he set out to select all the plants with medicinal properties from the area in order to establish a demonstration plot. As he recalled, *'I started to relate to the plants, for I did not know much about them in this area. I had to detect them and learn their names, the scientific and popular ones'.*

Samuel and Alberto planned to promote the cultivation of medicinal plants for commercial purposes and had developed connections with a Swiss exporter. After some time they had a variety of plants and were experimenting with various planting distances, stalks per station and so on. They had also acquired a plant dryer. Samuel began to look for settlers willing to grow these plants. In the beginning it was decided to work with four different settlers, each on a half-hectare plot with five different plant species. But problems began to surface as soon as the plants were ready to be collected. The dryer could not cope with the large volumes produced and it appeared that the Swiss exporter suddenly did not have the connections required for exporting the plants. He was convinced that there was a large international market for the plants but he had underestimated how difficult it was to enter it. In Samuel's opinion, a court case could have been taken up and won against the exporter but it was hardly worth the effort. This was a bitter experience for him: *'My conscience said to me that I had to find a way of getting rid of the plant material while paying the farmers for it. Otherwise I would lose their trust'* he recalls. In the end he decided to buy the plants himself: *'I had established friendship relations with several settlers and I knew that they would be very disappointed in me if I told them that there was no market for the plants'.* In fact, he paid the farmers the prices agreed to with money he had borrowed himself, incurring a heavy financial loss in the process. This, it must be said, illustrates a very rare example of an extensionist assuming responsibility for programme failure. In a more typical situation, the settlers would have been blamed for such a failure, accused of 'ignorance', laziness' or the inability to follow their instructions.

From then on, Samuel decided to place more emphasis on the social function of the programme by providing home-grown medicines and preventative herbs (against headaches, nervous illness, etc.) for the farmers and their families. He planned the programme so that it would incorporate a number of educational

activities, and settlers were offered the plants for free. Altogether some sixty gardens were established in the settlement, including a communal garden set-up for settlers to examine and choose the plants they wanted. There were also various field days (*días de campo*) organised and gardens were established on the school grounds in collaboration with the teachers. It was hoped that they would explain to the children the various uses of plants and that the latter would take them home. In fact, the teachers also ended up playing an important role in approaching settlers who were interested in the programme.

In this way, Samuel became well known in the community and established working relationships with numerous settlers. Although some efforts were made to find a commercial market, a reliable exporter could not be found and many lost interest due to the absence of a commercial outlet. After a while the demand for the plants began to decrease sharply and only a minority of the settlers continued with the programme. The medicinal programme came to a standstill not long after, when he became more involved in other crop programmes. Despite its apparent failure, Samuel nevertheless was of the opinion that some success had been achieved with the programme. One settler in Milano, for instance, had created an income for himself by raising four hectares of oregano and selling it at the producers' market in San José. The same settler also provided medicinal plants to UPAGRA, who organised a festival during which the women with the most beautiful gardens were awarded prizes. Samuel proudly asserted that all of the material came originated from one of his demonstration plots. It had nevertheless become clear to him that men were predominantly interested in commercial programmes. In this way, Samuel had discerned the different underlying interests between women and men with regard to livelihood strategies. As he put it,

*'with men you have to talk in colones - the Costa Rican currency - because they are mostly interested in money. Women are more interested in family affairs, cheap medicines, and the opportunity to have a small additional income. The medicinal plants programme demanded a lot of work, and men were not going to provide it if the monetary reward did not correspond to the amount of labour they expended.'*

He had also had problems in other settlements with the women's groups that were assisted by the 'women and development' section of the IDA. The social workers had promised them good profits in a short time, if only they would organise themselves properly. Although the quantities produced were small enough to sell in one of the regional markets, the plants required careful selection to provide a good product. Once Alberto Ramos and Samuel were accused of deceiving the women after the produce fetched a much lower price than had been expected. Marketing, Samuel pointed out, was a profession in itself, and he admitted that in their enthusiasm they had made the error of suggesting to the women that the main difficulty was that of growing the plants. Indeed, he recognised that he had been too paternalistic in his relations with settlers. The main lesson of this experience for him was that production and marketing problems could not be resolved by extensionists alone. It would require close co-operation between extensionists and their beneficiaries.

### *The Chilli Programme*

After the not so positive experience of the medicinal plants scheme came the chilli programme. Samuel was convinced that the only way to solve the livelihood problems of the settlers was by developing a mix of profitable cash crops that were suited to smallholder cultivation. From the outset he had been looking for a spice that would attract the commitment of a wider group of farmers, but he could not find anything which combined good market possibilities with existing agronomic conditions.

His choice for the red pepper - or chilli - came by chance. A settler once mentioned to him that he was thinking of cultivating chilli. He told Samuel that close to Pocora some farmers had been growing it and had had no difficulty in selling it. This interested him greatly so he went to Pocora where he inspected a few plots and talked to the purchasers. He also spoke with the manager of a processing company, Kamouk. It appeared that the manager was a very open person and they immediately got along well. On that same occasion they talked of a possible production area of fifty hectares. Later, they reduced the planned area to twenty-five hectares, in view of the high yields that they expected.

There was not much available data on the hot chilli, as only ASBANA - the National Association of Banana Producers - had been doing research on it. With the help of information that was provided by the Chilli growers Samuel had met, he made a cost calculation (*avio*) which he presented to the Credit Fund. He had a good relationship with functionaries from the Fund in San José, and they decided to extend credit for the programme. Subsequently he initiated the search for possible programme beneficiaries. As he recalled:

*'First I talked to settlers I knew from the medicinal plants programme, but there was not much interest. Then I made lists of the best farmers with the help of two other técnicos. On the basis of that list I succeeded in finding twenty five beneficiaries.'*

However, many settlers still had lingering doubts. Chilli was a new and relatively unknown crop in the area and all other previous programmes had been failures. Consequently, some of the farmers decided to plant only half a hectare, which meant that only seventeen of the targeted twenty-five hectares was reached. In any case, there was much distrust amongst the farmers. The first credit delivery, for example, was not accepted by the settlers because they wanted to have more information. Ultimately, however, they fared very well. As Samuel recalled,

*'Much better than any of us would have dreamed. In fact, I would have already been relieved if it had not become another failure. In fact, this was the first really successful programme in the settlement and some beneficiaries made a profit of as much as 600 thousand colones.'*

Samuel calculated that altogether it had made the settlement seven to eight million *colones* richer. This of course had significant consequences for him. As he said,

*'Since then the roles changed and instead of me pursuing them, settlers would start asking me if they could participate in the programme. But the market was restricted and I could not include any more beneficiaries.'*

A major advantage of red peppers is that they grow on infertile soils, provided the drainage is good. However, they are not well suited to humid tropical areas since they are highly vulnerable to a fungus called *malla*, which as yet cannot be controlled. It would only be question of time before *malla* arrived, after which chilli would not be able to be grown for at least three years without being



affected by traces residing in the soil. Samuel realised that sooner or later the plantations would be affected by this illness. Chilli, then, was a transitional crop. It offered many the opportunities to make a quick profit but would not provide a long-term alternative to the production and marketing problem.

Early successes saw the number of chilli cultivators expand to forty-two across the entire settlement, with many farmers financing their own chilli. However, Samuel gave preference to settlers in the poorest settlement sectors. Indeed, he claimed that he was in search of profitable alternatives for those areas in the settlement with the poorest soils. Furthermore, Samuel adopted a careful attitude towards credit, not providing new chilli cultivators with credit because of the risks incurred by the spread of *malla*.

He continued his search for a longer-term solution and eventually 'discovered' *maracuya* (custard apple). Again, it was the suggestion of a settler who told him that fairly large plots of custard apple were being planted in the area of Sarapiquí that led him to this. He promptly went to the area to investigate. At the National Bank of the village of San Miguel he obtained a cost projection that had been made for a few producers who were cultivating *maracuya* with bank credit. *Maracuya*, he decided, had the same favourable characteristics as chilli in that it provided a regular monthly income but more importantly, it was better adapted to the Atlantic Zone.

#### *Relationships with settlers*

Samuel, like the other officials, was selective with regard to the people he worked with, although he claimed that he got along with the majority and had had bad relationships with only two or three. He recounted a nasty experience with a really 'difficult settler' (*problemático*), Norberto Casas. He described him in the following way,

*'There is in El Silencio (one of the sectors of the Neguev settlement) a farmer called Norberto Casas, who is terrible. He criticises everything, he gossips with you about other officials and with them he gossips about you. He also spreads stories about his neighbours and then when you visit them you feel uncomfortable. Since he is an older man he thinks he knows everything better than us kids. First I had problems with him because he did not want to follow my recommendations. He even diverted the credit. Once I gave him money to buy inputs and he pocketed it. Then I wrote a really harsh note to him (bien chiva) with a copy to the Credit Fund in which I made clear to him that given the fact that he was diverting credit and that he gossiped about me and about other técnicos I could not continue assisting him. I had already given him a lot of credit, about sixty thousand. I talk to him only if it is absolutely necessary. I attempt not to have any kind of involvement with him.'*

In his view, issues like this concerning the trust relationships between *técnico* and farmer cannot be taken into consideration in programme design, and this makes extension practice much more complex in reality than it is on paper. He would argue,

*'That is the problem with these programmes of technological transfer. You can design a technological package but you cannot change the farmer. How are you going to change the customs of someone who has been tilling the land for twenty-five years? In the end extension amounts to a matter of personal relationships.'*

The issue of control was important to him in trust relationships. He therefore found it easier to work with new crops, unknown to the farmer and requiring modern technology. When comparing maize with chilli for example, he would argue that settlers have extensive knowledge of maize but they were forced to listen more to the *técnico* when it came to chilli. It was then easier to wield control over the application of a technological package with a crop like chilli. Trust between him and the farmer was in his view essential to his work. Trust, however, was not merely intuitive but something that could be tested on the farmer. Before going to the field, for example, Samuel always reviewed a file with recommendations and notes that he had made about the settlers he was going to visit. Trust for him was something that should be validated on the basis of real progress. It was not merely based on friendship or sympathy. It was just as much based on the confidence the farmer has in the *técnico* and vice-versa. In elaborating upon this theme Samuel commented,

*'With settlers I usually have a good relationship. Yet I always keep a distance. That is my nature. It takes time before I trust them. That has nothing to do with the fact that I am a técnico and they supposedly peasants. For, neither do I have relationships of friendship with the other técnicos'*

And in talking about them he said,

*'They are colleagues [compañeros]. But to say that they are friends, well I do not know what your concept of friendship is... to have a friend, I consider, is like having a brother. You must have a lot of confianza [confidence]. I would say that here I do not have real friends, but there is certainly a feeling of friendship among us.'*

Establishing a friendship with a settler was problematic in his view, since it could give rise to situations that should not occur in a relationship between a farmer and a *técnico*, such as displays of disrespect. Yet, he was clear in arguing that, *'in essence it does not matter to me that they are farmers. I have been a farmer myself for a long time. Friendship after all is a personal relationship, it is subjective'*. These remarks reveal a contrast between Samuel's attitude and that of the other *técnicos*, who were accustomed to making displays of friendship with settlers, often characterised by jokes and by not taking things too seriously. Samuel's attitude was more concerned with establishing relations with settlers based on mutual respect, confidence and trust.

He had once had a disappointing experience with a settler, who he had included in the chilli programme and whom he considered as someone who could play an important role as a local leader. The settler in question ended up diverting credit for other uses. *'Actually'*, he argued, *'I like him as a person, but that does not conceal that I am disillusioned'*. On the other hand, there were settlers he did not trust initially but for whom he gained much appreciation in the course of his work. As he put it, *'in the course of a relationship you learn things from them and often you have experiences that are not pleasant at all'*.

Trust as the basis for a working relationship, and for a possible friendship, did not in his view form an excuse for unjust or politically oriented criticism. One experience he had with an UPAGRA leader attests to this. During a visit made to Neguev by some *técnicos* from an agro-processing company to provide information on non-traditional export crops, one UPAGRA sympathiser began a tirade of criticism against the IDA, pointing out what he saw as the political function of production programmes. Samuel recalls this as a very unpleasant

experience, especially since it took place in front of an outsider. In his opinion 'dirty linen should be washed at home'. Another radical leader, on that occasion, congratulated him for his commitment and called him the first técnico in the settlement who showed that he was ready to share his knowledge with the peasants. Yet, he continued questioning him for not being able to take an independent stand vis-à-vis the local administration. As this radical settler put it, *'Look, Samuel, you have shown that you are not afraid of establishing relationships with peasants and thereby to run risks. Why are you afraid to question the institution's policy of dividing the community? As a child you surely contradicted your mother, didn't you? Well, I think that an institution does not deserve more respect than your own mother'*.

In effect, Samuel had an ambiguous relationship with UPAGRA leaders. On the one hand he resented the fact that the IDA's Regional Director in the Atlantic Zone, had at various times stopped him from working with organised groups which were considered to be close to UPAGRA. The Regional Director had once forced Samuel to dispose of a truck full of medicinal plants that were to be delivered to such a group. On the other hand, Samuel had an ongoing conflict with a few of the peasant leaders who argued that he was neglecting the need to forge strong local organisations that could defend the producers' interests, and that his approach only benefited wealthier pro-IDA producers. Samuel, in fact, was very sensitive to these arguments, but he argued strongly against a political approach to the 'organisation' problem. Contrary to many of the radical peasant leaders, he was totally opposed to using the Association of Small Producers, essentially a farmers organisation, as a platform for dealing with social and political objectives related to community issues. He referred to the success of the coffee sector in Costa Rica, achieved through piecemeal but constant efforts at building strong organisations focused on production instead of politics. He did, however, take the view that a union such as UPAGRA should be given the opportunity to defend the interests of the peasants in a peaceful and collaborative way. It was a disappointment to him that many peasant leaders with highly developed organisational and rhetorical skills were not involved in the establishment of local organisations. He would bemoan the fact that many of these characters preferred to spend their time 'smoking marihuana and drinking' instead of working hard on their plots to repay their debts.

#### *Samuel's personal projects in relation to the bureaucracy*

I went to the field various times with Samuel, usually in his old jeep but a few times - when his car was being repaired - I offered to drive him around. Samuel was quite open about his view of the institute and about his personal projects. He also liked to reflect on the deceptions and tensions that working with smallholders entailed, on the political underpinnings of administrative life and on his aspiration to be paid in accordance with his professional abilities and dedication. He repeatedly asserted that he had little aspiration to ascend within the institute. A major reason for that was that he did not like office work. In addition, he dreaded the kind of political struggles an institute's manager had to become involved in to maintain himself in that position. Moreover, he was thinking of cutting his ties with the IDA because of the low salaries that were paid. He was even considering going independent and providing extension to

producers on a private basis. He was emphatic in his belief that the only incentive he had received till now was the gratitude of smallholders. He had received little recognition from the administration and once made the comment that taking initiatives in an institution provided no rewards, only risks. *'If the chilli programme had been a failure, everyone would have blamed me. And the same holds for the new programmes I am involved in'*.

## **Discussion: operational styles and governance**

It is remarkable that although Samuel has been considered by farmers, colleagues and his superiors alike as an exemplary extensionist, he has not been very successful in his professional career in the IDA. One reason for this is that he has spent too much time with the farmers and is too committed to them. Although he has been viewed as a good and dependable colleague, he is also considered an odd one: someone who cannot be counted on in a political conflict. He has a dislike of politics and therefore has not been able to develop a network of friends within the institution. With the exception of the relationship with his former teacher, he has no protectors at higher levels.

On the other hand, his relationships with the farmers are not devoid of difficulties either. Most farmers would consider him as being the best and only responsible extensionist in the regional office but many have accused him of working only with farmers he likes. In the light of his past experiences with 'difficult' settlers and the prohibitions imposed upon him by regional administrators about working with organised groups (for fear these may be infiltrated by 'radical peasant leaders'), he has decided to develop very personal relationships of trust with selected settlers. The notion of trust is central to his style of operation but it is a trust that is not simply given away. Trust, as Samuel defines it, is subject to continuous re-assessment. His caution here is the result of having been deceived, more than once, by farmers he thought he could trust. He accounts for this lack of trustworthiness by referring to the 'special character' of farmers in the Atlantic Zone *'who are so different from those in my area of origin'*.

His relationship with 'radical UPAGRA leaders', though personally friendly, has also been characterised by a degree of distrust and lack of confidence. Although he appreciates their organisational capacities, he believes they should concentrate more on becoming good farmers instead of engaging in political activity. His reply to leaders claims that the institution has, for political reasons, set out to destroy their efforts to establish peasant producers' organisations, is that they should seek a constructive type of relationship with the IDA administration instead of the current conflictive approach.

To round off this discussion, I would pose the following question. What can a focus on this extensionist's style of operation and life-world tell us about 'the construction of accountabilities and moralities' as defining features of patterns of governance? To begin with it is clear that Samuel's life-world has not been confined to the spatial and strategic options promoted by policy-makers, even though these options did acquire a 'reality' of their own at settlement level as 'powerful instruments for allocating resources'. Samuel, though apparently complying with the project's technocratic policy discourse, did not adhere to

them in principle and strongly relied upon his previous experiences in his native area when dealing with settlers. Although he did adopt the official discourse of labelling settlers in the Atlantic Zone as troublesome, in practice he established very personal working relationships with individual settlers.

Accordingly, institutional performance cannot be understood solely in terms of the 'the deployment and appropriation of policy discourses by different sets of actors' for there are various extra-institutional factors that affect relationships between front-line workers (such as extensionists) and farmers. In Samuel's case, we see that although he was constrained by IDA policy in his attempts to establish working relations with the settler population at large, he still managed to find room to manoeuvre in establishing effective networks for determined crop programmes. These networks, in fact, can be seen as the emergent properties of the social interaction between a farmer and a group of farmers.

Finally, what implications does this analysis have for the notion of governance, and in particular, for the possibilities of integrating institutionalist and actor-oriented approaches? In my view, policy and analytical models such as governance should be treated as rough approximations of a reality *as imagined* by policy-makers and researchers. This does not imply that these models are false in the sense that they fail to represent real life correctly. They are, however, coloured by the professional and analytical interests of those who busy themselves in fashioning them. It follows then, that although influencing the way in which policy-makers design policies, the assumptions held by governance models about the separate existence of the market, civil society and state domains are highly questionable.

To conclude with, I would argue that policy and analytical models are highly consequential in shaping social interactions between different sets of actors in ways that are not predicted by the models themselves. These patterns of social interaction, as I have suggested, have emergent properties that in turn reveal the simplified character of policy/analytical models. An actor-oriented approach, then, can document and analyse the mutually constitutive relationship between these policy/analytical models and defined patterns of social interaction.

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