A Place of the Village Rural Land Management Committee in Land Governance in Tioro: North Ivory Coast

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ABSTRACT

This study is guided by the question how does the Village Committee for Rural Land Management intervene in a land context that reserves the exclusivity of land governance to customary authorities? The objective is to analyze the political implications of the institution of the land committee in land governance in Tioro, a locality of the north of the Ivory Coast. Opting for a qualitative research approach, we have built a framework of investigation structured around the land system, customary land governance, the implementation of land law 98-750 and the forms of relations between actors and authorities. This investigation framework was submitted to the traditional and administrative authorities, to the agents of the Rural Land Service of the Regional Directorate of Agriculture, to the members of the land committee and to the land users. It emerges from this study that the Tioro land system is structured around the collective use of the land and the organization of its governance around the village chief, and land chief. Despite the establishment of a Village Land Management Committee, a new frame resulting from the application of law 98 750 of December 23 relating to rural land, customary authorities remain the central figures of local land governance. Reclaimed by customary land authorities, the land committee functions as a technical instrument controlled by the chief. The mode of rural land governance inaugurated by the involvement of the Land Committee at the village level further strengthens the power of customary authorities.

Keywords: Customary Power, Land Committee, Land Certificate, Land Governance, Land Reform, Tioro.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ivorian rural land is at the center of social cohesion and economic development questions because it is strongly structured by the internal and external migratory dynamics of populations in relation to agricultural development (Kouamé, 2018). Its history is closely linked to that of the settlement of the country, of the agriculture around which the social fabric was tied. This is why the recent context of its management is also characterized by growing uncertainties which contribute to making land relations unpredictable and more often contentious (Kouadio & Chabit, 1994; Chauveau, 2000). To deal with these uncertainties and land conflicts, the Ivorian government has initiated a land reform process that aims to clarify rural land rights. This land reform is legally structured around law 98-750 of December 23, 1998, and the decrees that accompany it. These include Decree No. 99-593 of October 13, 1999, on the organization and powers of Rural Land Management Committees, Decree No. 99-594 of October 13, 1999, setting the terms of application to the Rural Land Domain customary law; and Decree No. 99-595 of October 13, 1999, establishing the procedure for consolidating the rights of temporary concessionnaires of land in the Rural Land Domain. Several years after its adoption, the literature reveals considerable constraints that do not facilitate the application of this law, which is supposed to put an end to land conflicts by securing land assets (Kouamé, 2018, Ngang et al. 2015). Its application has since been confronted with a lack of support from land users. One of the reasons for this situation is the will of the State to enact a normative and unified land legal instrument to regulate social relations built on non-homogeneous social practices and arrangements. The formalization or institutionalization of practices and arrangements based on the moral economy of tutoring by land law contributes to the lack of support from farmers and the occurrence of land conflicts (Chauveau, 2009).

Decree No. 99-593 of October 13, 1999, establishes and organizes the Rural Land Management Committee, a body for social participation in securing land tenure. But before the establishment of this
committee, each land system is regulated by specific institutions and standards. If the composition of the land management committee is based on the social categories of the village, there is no clear legibility of its functioning and its collaboration with other bodies of local land governance. Milan et al. (2017) question its legitimacy and legality in the land game of Affery (Centre-East) and Gnamagu (Centre-West). By considering the contextual and cultural variability of land tenure systems, we find justification for highlighting the positioning of the village committee for rural land management in Tioroniaradougou¹. a locality in the Senoufo country (Northern Ivorian) whose social organization and land system differ from societies studied by previous works. Here, the use or occupation of land does not confer a right of individual appropriation, but rather a right belonging to a group, a lineage, or a community.

Land ownership within the meaning of the land law is strictly associated with the function of the head of land who embodies land authority. Indeed, customary practices make the land chief the main person responsible for the management of the land. He delegates functions to village and family chiefs who manage the land in their governance area. This is the principle of the first occupation of the land and that of the transfer of the land for a donation agreement. The question that guides our research is how does the Village Committee for Rural Land Management intervene in a land context that reserves the exclusivity of land governance to customary authorities? In other words, what are the roles of the village land management committee in land governance in Tioro? What are the relations it maintains with the other bodies of land governance?

The objective of this study is to analyze the political implications of the functioning of the village rural land management committee in the land governance system in Tioro. The issue underlying it is to think, within the framework of land reform, on the reconfiguration of the State and its peasant societies with a view to reconciling national unity and socio-cultural diversity while valuing the principles of anchoring and pluralism. Through a qualitative approach favoring maintenance as the main data production technique, this study highlights the positioning of the Tioro village land management committee in land governance.

The rest of the text is organized around the presentation of the methodological approach, the restitution of the results, and their discussion.

II. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The study focuses on the role and operation of the village rural land management committee in the land governance established by the new land code. It is circumscribed in Tioro, a sub-prefecture of the department of Korhogo, the capital of Poro Region and Savannah District, in the North of the Ivory Coast. Our study population includes land users, administrative authorities, rural land service officials, customary authorities, members of the village committee and land users.

The Land Service of the Regional Directorate of Agriculture of Korhogo was our first contact when we decided to carry out the study. Discussions with the head of this service gave us an overview of the land certification process in the region. Tioro seemed to us to be an interesting field of research because the land committee is very active, unlike many localities where there is only a name.

Moreover, the proximity of this sub-prefecture to the city of Korhogo allowed us to combine research and teaching activities.

The exploratory phase (interviews and documentation) made it possible to build our investigation framework and to know the various interlocutors in the field. The position of the actors imposed on us a sample of the environment that “does not require that all the observations be made in a single place, but quite simply that they be treated as relating globally to the same environment” (Pires, 1997). Thus, we met our respondents in Korhogo and Tioro. We interviewed in Korhogo, the person in charge of the land service and certain actors residing in Tioro but working in Korhogo. The head of the department knows the land game of this locality well because as a Technical Agent, he was the investigating commissioner within the framework of the programs. In Tioro, our main interlocutors were the Sub-prefect, the village chief and his notables, the lineage chiefs and the members of the land committee. They are the main actors in local land governance. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed manually through a form structured around our qualitative indicators. We then carried out a content analysis to identify the main units of meaning.

¹ Tioroniaradougou and Tioro designate the same locality. Tioro is short for Tioroniaradougou. We will regularly use Tioro to lighten the text.
III. RESULTS

A. The Customary Land System

It emerges from the survey that land is seen as a resource and not as a commercial object. It is used to satisfy social or vital needs. Indeed, rural populations use the land to practice agriculture and build habitats. The choice of crops is the power of the head of the family. The land is primarily the support of agricultural activity and of all human life. But much more, the Senufo society makes it a deity. The earth is a divinity, see a living being. She represents a mother goddess, a genius. For society, it is not a mere matter or a vulgar thing. In this sense, it is not the property of an individual or a group. She belongs to herself alone. This deity should be treated with more love and respect. Indeed, behaving in this way towards her makes it possible to receive all the graces. We dedicate a cult to the land, hence the presence of hotels of worship in the fields. In this regard, testifies the land chief:

“My parents are the first to occupy the land. They signed agreements (a pact) with the gods and spirits. All generations must worship this god of the earth. In your field, you have to treat the land as you treat your child”.

One perceives in these remarks that the community conceives the earth as a sacred object. Disobedience to him could incur the wrath of the gods.

The first person who sealed the pact with the gods is the manager of the earth. Our respondents do not speak of an owner in the classic sense of the term. It is rather a privilege of the management of the land and its allocation to the lineages settled later. In Tioro, the ancestor who sealed the pact with the spirits of the earth is Kanigui. Consequently, all the land belonging to the canton belongs to it.

Customary land governance is the responsibility of three traditional authorities: the canton chief, the village chief and the lineage or family heads.

The canton chief “General Tarfolo” is the exclusive holder of all the land belonging to the canton. He is one of the descendants of the ancestor who sealed the pact with Mandêbélé (genius). He exercises a religious role which is to carry out the rituals. He is the guarantor of social order on the land and no installation can take place without his consent. In case of violation of its rights, General Tarfolo has a tool to enforce them, by proceeding to the “Tapargue”. It is a feared symbol that consists of cutting a plant locally called “katiargue”, planting it in the ground or taking tufts of grass and hanging them from tree branches on the offender’s plot.

The Tarfolo associates with the management of its land’s elderly people from different lineages and having a good reputation in the village. In terms of hierarchical link, he has under his direct authority the village chiefs, the heads of lineages. Each in its space of power plays several roles: ensuring the integrity of the land space, advocating social cohesion, serving as witnesses during land loans, settling land disputes, etc.

B. Landowners and Agrarian Reform

The survey data reveal that the land users of Tioro were involved during the pilot operations within the framework of the land law 98-750 of December 23, 1998. They welcomed several sensitization missions from the Agents of the Rural Land Service or pilot programs. The visits of rural land technical agents are an opportunity to disseminate information on the process of land tenure security, and training on the statutes, attributions and roles of the members of the land bodies. There are also training workshops which are organized by certain NGOs such as the “Korhogo Rural Animation” (ARK) and pilot structures of the various land law enforcement programs which allow farmers to familiarize themselves with the law and its implementing instruments.

Overall, the new land law is known to land users. But on certain technical aspects, they resort to technical land agents. The sub-prefect points out to us that in practice, there is a lot of confusion, some parts are confusing. On the side of some land users, member of the land committee, the knowledge is approximate. A member of the committee warns us that the turnover of committee members means that new members are not trained. Those who have benefited from the training are no longer active in the committee. However, apart from the pilot programs, the members of the village committees do not receive any specific training.

“My son, you yourself who are there have you seen the whole unfolding of this law? Those who were before can possess all this knowledge. Because they’ve all seen it in that law thing. But we who are currently in power, how many have been trained? Nobody except the secretary maybe. All in all, we do with little knowledge. Retired civil servant, member of the village committee for rural land management”.

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During this survey, the people interviewed indicate their agreement to this land tenure security project. The process itself is not a problem. It does not disturb or alter their way of life. The rules that govern their lives in society are observed so there is nothing to worry about. “We are simply asked to make papers to protect our land. It is for our own good. We will still own the land. There's no problem, so we'll do it”. (TK, lineage head). Another farmer, holder of a land certificate, head of the family, continues: “My child, when the news of having the birth certificate of the land arrived at our house, I was in my yard. Early in the morning, the land chief let me know that people are there. Hahii I ran to go there to do my paper.

Interviews with the general land administration provided knowledge on the demarcation of village land in the sub-prefecture of Tioro. From 2009 to 2020 the sub-prefecture received two projects initiated by the State.

First in 2009, Tioro received the National Program for Land Management and Rural Facilities (PNGTER). It was a question of delimiting only the villages. This program ended with the delimitation of 26 villages out of a total of 27. The reason for the non-delimitation of the last village (Ninfolonvogo) is due to land disputes. The section that separates Nonfolonvogo and Fonanvogo has been the subject of several years of conflict.

Then comes the Support Project for the Relaunch of Agricultural Sectors in Côte d'Ivoire (PARFACI) in 2019. The objective of this project was to delimit village lands and issue land certificates. The objective of the project is to ensure the revival of several agricultural sectors. For this project, Tioro was not initially concerned. But since the objective of delimiting 22,000 ha in the four sub-prefectures previously chosen was not achieved, Tioro was associated with the last one to achieve the expected results.

Between 2017 and 2020, in the sub-prefecture of Tioro, the Regional Directorate of Agriculture of Poro registered applications for land certificates within the framework of the PARFACI projects and the Solomougou dam rehabilitation project. At the end of these programs, eleven (11) files received for PARFACI and nine (9) files within the framework of the rehabilitation of the dam. The eleven land certificate application files relate to an area of 769.6809 ha and the nine others relate to an area of 810 ha.

According to respondents, the certificate request is a set of steps to follow in order to obtain a paper that secures the activities on a plot. It's about bringing together papers and people. Consult all actors or stakeholders as a witness to be granted this paper. The words of a lineage chief:

“It's a piece of paper that is like a witness before someone who wants to take your land. It is paper that will fight it”.

Land certificate applications always start with an investigation of the site concerned. This phase brings together all the neighbors and land agents responsible for conducting the operation. During this phase, the presence of customary authority is mandatory. It is she who decides when disputes arise over a boundary, even when the neighbors refuse to admit it. He is a determining personality that cannot be removed from the operation. This is reflected in the comments of this land certificate applicant.

“Me the day I made the request, the people there called me afterwards to tell me that they are going to investigate. As it is a matter of land, so that someone does not say that the land there is for him. I first made a sign to the neighbors then to the land chief who was already informed. He is the one who knows things well (the earth). He knows the history of the village”.

The words of this lineage chief and a notable insist on the personality of the land chief:

“In this village things are in their place. We don't disturb anything. Even in the sacred grove these things we are told. The head of land is not just anyone with us, he is very strong. You who make the land as if for you and we talk to you, you don't want to understand anything here if he makes a decision, it's over for you”.

Another lineage head adds:

“Well you see that the land there is for him and then you leave him to go and see someone else. You can't even win paper. Even if we are sons of the village”.

Clearly, it appears that the figure of the land chief is highly respected by users of rural land in the process of applying for a land certificate.

C. The Village Rural Land Management Committee in Land Governance

The village land management committee is set up by the decree n°99-593 of October 13, 1999 on the organization and powers of the Land Management Committees Rural. The Tioro committee was created
within the framework of the National Land Management and Rural Equipment Program (PNGETER) and formalized Decision No. 02 /MEMIS/SP/TIORO of April 24, 2015. worked official act. It was after that it was formalized by decision of the Sub-prefect.

According to article 5 of the decree quoted above, its composition and its functioning are defined according to the practices of the village with the supervision of the agents of the Ministry of Agriculture. The composition of the committee must be representative of the social strata of the village. The members were appointed at the end of a General Assembly organized at village level, sanctioned by minutes of the creation of the committee. This report was sent to the Sub-prefect who then signed the decision to create the village committee for rural land management (CVGFR).

Customary land governance authorities are ex-officio members of the Tioro Village Rural Land Management Committee. These are the chief of the canton, the chief of the village, the chief of land and the chief of the sacred grove. The committee is composed of nine (9) members namely the president, the vice-president, the secretary general and his assistant and five others are members. Article 3 of the decision creating the committee specifies that the “committee has the freedom in its internal organization to assign functions to the various members according to its needs”. In reality, the composition of the committee was based on the customary land organization. The members of the committee are those who make up the notability who officiate in land matters.

The CVGFR of Tioro piloted the various land surveys in order to facilitate the delimitation of village lands and the issuance of land certificates. In conducting the surveys, the members of the committee, based on their knowledge of the principles of customary land governance and the standards of agrarian reform, give their opinions on the various problems raised by the work of delimiting village lands.

It is the president of the CVGFR (head of canton) who signs the certificates or the closure of publicity with the investigating commissioner. He signs all the different papers concerning the delimitation of the villages, of course, with the agreement of his members who meet.

The members of the CVGFR have a mandate of two years renewable during a General Assembly. Some members are not very active after their designation in the office. Others, on the other hand, die during their term of office. This is what justifies the renewal of the office in the second year of exercise.

Committee members meet when called by the president or the sub-prefect. Decisions are taken by the CVGFR committee by vote, as mentioned by the Secretary General of the Committee, who said: “With us, decisions are taken by vote. But, as we are in Senufo country and tradition teaches us that it is the chief of the village or of the land who has the last word, in addition to that which is not disputed by a member of the committee. No one knows better than the village or land chiefs”.

The village committee for rural land management in Tioro is responsible for studying all files concerning land disputes and disputes. He gives his opinion, but the power of decision belongs either to justice or to the Administration when the problem has already been submitted to them. But if it is circumscribed at the village level, the committee gives its opinion in the management of land disputes but also takes decisions under the authority of the village chief. The general secretary of the CVGFR tells us in the remarks which follow the intervention of the village committee in the management of the land conflicts.

“When there is a conflict, the village chief (head of the committee) is seized by the case, he calls the two protagonists to explain themselves. After the explanations of the two protagonists, the village chief appeals to his college of notables, because the village has a community of notables who manage the affair with the knowledge of history. Everyone explains and the village chief or the canton chief (committee) decides and says: listen to the parents of so and so, they had installed you there, so it is you who entered the area of the other, so you have to release. If, on the contrary, he wants to refuse in the light of the explanations of the land chief or canton chief (Committee), if there is one who repeats the offense, they go so far as to drink the land (swear on the land) and earth will choose whoever the earth belongs to. If the land does not belong to one of the people, he will die. So, when we get to that level, everyone questions themselves. Finally, this is the last attempt to settle or manage land disputes in Tioro. But often there are testimonies which come to decide the case, generally with the knowledgeable (committees), that is regulated without problem”.

D. Relations Between the Land Committee and Other Local Land Governance Authorities

In carrying out its functions, the CVGFR aligns itself with customary land principles. It conducts land surveys concerning the delimitation of parcels and village territories (statement of boundaries, publication of the results of surveys, keeping of the register of agreements and objections, assistance in settling differences). Its operation respects village land principles. He does not carry out any activity independently. All its activities are conducted under the authority of the village chief. As a result, its members do not identify any particular problems that hinder the activities of the committee.
Our investigations do not allow us to mention a particular problem between the land committee and the customary land authority. Not only are the two bodies merged, but they are headed by the same person, who is also the first customary land manager. Consequently, in practice, the CVGFR confirms and reinforces the authority of the village chief. During committee meetings, the right to speak of each actor is respected. No one crushes the other because of his position or status. Everyone speaks freely. However, the last word belongs to the land chief or the canton chief, specifies the secretary of the committee. The decisions of the customary authority are not called into question: “With us there is no disorder. We collaborate perfectly with each other. We listen to the land chief a lot. The land chief truly shows in his interventions that he masters his territory”. Words from a member of the committee, a lineage chief.

The administrative authorities, in particular the Sub-Prefect and the technical agents of the Regional Directorate of Agriculture maintain good relations with the village committee for rural land management. As part of the programs, these authorities worked with the committee to carry out land surveys and to manage disputes. The committee collaborates with the investigating commissioners in carrying out land investigations. As for the Sub-prefect, it is he who signs the opening and the conclusion of the investigations. The results of the surveys are transmitted to him for the follow-up of the process of issuance of land certificate. Overall, it is under his authority that the activities of the village land management committee are carried out.

No program has been carried out without the agreement of the administrative authorities who are primarily responsible for the process of issuing land certificates. The administrative authorities involve the committee in all activities related to rural land. As a result, the CVGFR is an auxiliary of the Administration. The Sub-prefect does not take a decision without consulting the village chief who is the president of the CVGFR. The Secretary General says:

“The Sub-prefect is the chief and the chief of the village is the sub-chief, so all the decisions of the Sub-prefect go through the sub-chief who is the chief of the village, who passes them on to the community. If there is a commission concerning land, the Sub-prefect refers to the canton chief and the village chief, they in turn transmit this commission to the community through the channel of the CVGFR committee, that is the relations between the Administration and the traditional side. The Sub-prefect is the guarantor, then come the district chief and the village chief, as much to say that what is Tioro land is the responsibility of the district chief and the village chief, as administratively the sub-prefect represents the president of the republic, which is above any institution, that’s why we owe him his respects”.

The respondents do not identify any major problems between the land committee and the administrative authorities. The collaboration between these bodies happens without major difficulties. In the past, it was the Sub-prefect who settled land disputes. But the power was given to the head of the canton and the head of the village, so the administration still refers to the CVGFR committee for land management. This is reflected in the words of the secretary general of the committee:

“There is no overlap, nor any idea of recovery. The Administration or the government has determined the role of each in land management. So, the Sub-prefect, unless the conflict opposes people who can come to arms, always refers to the village chief and the canton chief because it is they who know the allocations of the lands of each in Tioro, on the other hand the sub-prefect, is a foreigner in the territory of Tioro. This is why he refers to the district chief or village chief to lead or manage land disputes, which is why we do not send a land problem to justice. When you go to court for a land problem concerning Tioro, the justice refers or submits the problem to the canton chief or to the village rural land management committee. In addition, when there is a problem that opposes peasants in an area over a land problem, when the problem comes back to the Sub-prefect, he brings them back to the canton chief or the committee. In short, there is no ambiguity in land management in the village of Tioro. But the Sub-Prefect always refers to the village chief, giving him his place of responsibility in customary management”.

In addition, any Sub-Prefect who will interfere in a land management affair without the consent or the opinion of the canton chief, village chief and the committee will mismanage the land phenomenon. When a Sub-prefect decides to manage a land phenomenon alone, he will provoke conflicts between the Administration and the authorities, first of all at the CVGFR. For any land problem, the Sub-prefect knows in his rights that it must first be entrusted to the Committee. This is why the administrative authorities have decided to leave the land management problems to the CVGFR, but under the arbitration of the sub-prefect, secretary of the committee.
IV. DISCUSSION

The results of our surveys show a strong hierarchy of land governance in the canton of Tioro. The canton chief, the main figure in customary land governance, derives his legitimacy from his lineage. He is the head of the line of the founder of the canton, therefore the main manager of the lands conquered by the founding ancestor. He is therefore the consecrated interlocutor between the users of the earth and the gods who live there. The introduction of agrarian reform in such a land tenure system contributes to the emergence of new institutional bodies which do not obey the same principles, and which do not have the same legitimacy as that of the customary chief. These new bodies derive their legitimacy from the land reform, through the institutional texts (law, decree and decision). The village rural land management committee was the main legal body that interested us in this work. For us, it was a question of analyzing the forms of relations maintained by the bodies of customary land governance and those resulting from the land reform.

In the composition of the village rural land management committee, the customary chief has a central place. It is he who presides over it. We note the presence of the main social categories of the village (young people, lineage leaders, dozo hunters, etc.). The representation of these different social categories in the committee contributes to a social and participatory land governance of land. The advantage of such a composition is to give everyone a voice.

On the one hand, the land governance established by the law integrates the symbolic (chairmanship of the committee by the canton chief) and legal (creation of the committee by order of the sub-prefect) dimensions to create trust between land stakeholders, and therefore to limit land disputes. It does not work against customary power. On the contrary, the two structures are merged and organized around the village chief. On the other hand, in the case of Tioro, there is an adaptation of land law 98-750 of December 23, 1998, to the customary land principles of Senoufo society. Indeed, Decree No. 2019-264 of March 27, 2019, establishing the village committee for rural land management clearly mentions the participation of women in the committee by appointing a representative (art.8). But here, no woman is included in the land committee. This observation can be explained by the committee's alignment with the land principles of Senoufo society. Among this people of northern Côte d'Ivoire, women do not participate in decision-making relating to land. His word is somehow carried by the man. Her access to the use of the land is through the intermediary of the man (husband, brother, father, etc.).

Consequently, if the village committee for rural land management derives its legality from the land law and its implementing texts, it is an instrument that the customary land system has appropriated to adapt it to its mode of operation. Unlike the cases of Affery (South-East) and Gnamagui (Centre-West) studied by Mlan et al. (2017) collaboration between the land committee and other political entities does not create tensions.

Moreover, the mode of land management and the mode of access to land are known to all the villagers, including foreigners. The guarantor of tradition exists both at the lineage level and in the village community. Even with the involvement of the CVGFR in land governance, the village chief, land chief, remains solely responsible and the first guarantor of the land management method. The old bodies and the CVGFR are put together in the land management organization creating a new view of all the land management procedures. In other words, the rules that regulate land governance do not change, they are better known by the populations.

Upon analysis, the customary authorities recognize the institution of the village rural land management committee as a sub-group of notables established by the government which helps to control and manage land management (land certificate and land demarcation, registration,) and upstream and downstream conflicts. Consequently, there is an interdependence in the land governance of Tioro between customary and state authorities. Indeed, the village rural land management committee does not have political autonomy; it is included in the customary body under the direction of the village chief.

From the point of view of the local administration, the Sub-prefect positions the village committee for rural land management as an executive body at the service of the customary authority and the local administration. The village authorities and the members of the land committee are fully aware of the mission or the basis of this recent land authority. For them, the village committee constitutes a framework of expertise at the service of the state and customary authorities.

We are certainly in a context of “plurality of institutions” but a mastered and controlled pluralism. The first moments of the functioning of the land committees created a complicated pluralism due to the overlapping of competencies due to the ignorance of the role of these committees by the land actors (Lavigne-Delville, 1998), our results show a perfect collaboration between authorities in the governance land in Tioro. In contexts of complicated pluralism, the overlapping of competencies is inevitable because the introduction of new bodies is done in competition with customary institutions, whose legitimacy comes from the anteriority of installation. Not mastering local norms and practices, these new institutions evolve in ignorance of the foundations of the relationships and arrangements between the actors they want to direct.
Certainly, in Tioro, we are in a context of a plurality of institutions in land governance, but their collaboration does not lead to major difficulties. Basically, there are no tensions or conflicts around the recognition of land rights. The case studied does not reveal any real conflicting issues between operators. Moreover, the power of customary land authorities is not challenged by rural land users.

The same customary authorities run the new and last institution (CVGFR) and all decisions are theirs. Kandine (2008, p. 24), observes that in “West African countries and in Niger in particular, the traditional structures maintain a resistance because the customary authorities who hold the real power of land management consider that the State is in the process of ‘organize the weakening of their authority by wresting most of their competence’ in favor of the new ones created within the framework of the land reforms. As the data from our study show, the involvement of the village committee for rural land management strengthens the power of customary authorities in land governance in Tioro. The fusion of forms (traditional and state) gives more authority to the customary authority, which is a key player in land governance.

V. CONCLUSION

It is on the basis of the observation of the poor documentation of the positioning of village rural land management committees in land governance that this research was initiated. It clearly reveals that law 98-750 of 23 December 1998 relating to rural land and its implementing decrees establish a new local land governance. In Tioro, in a land system built around the customary chief, the exclusive manager of land rights, the introduction of a new land management body breaks with customary land norms. However, unlike some land contexts where jurisdictional conflicts occur, the case of Tioro shows us a reappropriation and adaptation of land reform and its instruments to the standards of customary land governance. Thus, the village chief, president of the land committee, always retains his political privileges conferred by his membership of the founding lineage of the village. He remains the exclusive manager of the lands under his governance. In a non-competitive land system, where the authority of customary power is not challenged, the operation of the land committee does not encounter any major political difficulties or constraints. On the contrary, it is reappropriated and becomes an executive instrument that does not compete with the old institutions of land governance. The involvement of the land chief, a central figure in customary land governance, in the Village Land Management Committee, means that it functions as a complementary structure to customary governance.

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