Resisting reforms. A Resource-based perspective of collective action in the distribution of agricultural input and primary health services in the Couffo region, Benin
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Annexe A - Justification of the choice of Crane’s valuation techniques

The valuation technique developed by Crane (1989) derives mainly from the perspective that beneficiaries of a project must participate in the various phases from the elaboration to the ex-post evaluation of the project. Therefore, the evaluation of each stage of the project requires that criteria specific to beneficiaries be included, for instance, the degree of people’s participation and their input in terms of goals, course of action, and resource allocation. This proposition is not novel; most evaluation programmes include people’s perceptions as an important part of impact assessment. More generally, the literature in development economics with a poverty-focused orientation, for instance, the advocate of ‘Farmers first’ (Chambers 1995; Chambers 1989), stresses the use of characteristics specific to vulnerable groups in the evaluation process. However, what is relevant for the present study is that Crane (1989) urged to take the level of development set by beneficiaries as benchmark for assessing a project or a programme. The difference here stems from a complete reliance on expert-designed criteria to beneficiary-assessed development processes.

Anthropologists provide insightful arguments to justify the superiority of people’s own evaluations over external evaluation. Richards (1993, p. 72) reported a case of on-field experimentation works performed by two groups of farmers. He found that, for the same farming operation, the group that was accompanied with drums performed better than the group without. The author uncovered that members of the farm households judge the success of their on-farm actions by whether these further their social projects more generally. He then concluded that a clear delineation be made between knowledge, performance and the like. However, Cohen (1993) mitigated such a conclusion by stating that the sense of discrete local knowledge does not deny that outsiders could know what we know, but, rather, that they could know as we know. Accordingly, it is suggested to view the world across rural people’s conceptual boundaries.

As an illustration, Richards (1993) put forth whether the interpretation of a given cropping pattern in small-scale rain-fed agriculture should be viewed as a plan or performance. To this end, he suggested a spatial and temporal reconstruction of events. He then found that the crop mix - the layout of different crops in the field - is not a design, but a result (p. 67). Therefore, getting performance factors right or wrong will depend on the evaluation method used and on whether performance criteria are set out by performers or by external expertise.

What is the relevance to the present study?
The perspective explored in this study is actor-oriented and is illustrated to some extent by the evaluation processes dealt with by Richards (1993). Such evaluation techniques are in line with the resource-based perspective. In fact, a reliance on organisational capabilities forces the management staff of firms to be actor-oriented in their evaluation process. This is to assert that more credit is conferred to actors’ perceptions than to external evaluation. These evaluation techniques also do not contradict the institutional economics perspective. For instance, the latter perspective considers that the institutional environment is shaped by government policy and people’s rules, norms and values. An evaluation of intervention projects must start by acknowledging those dual roles from the outset. Next, it should also be admitted that the beneficiaries shape the project in the first place. Therefore, the performance of the project is primarily their concern. This is the justification for a people’s evaluation of the distribution of agricultural input and primary health services.