

# *les dossiers* d'**AGROPOLIS** INTERNATIONAL

*Expertise of the scientific community*



## Societies and sustainable development

*Contribution of the social sciences*

# A guide to sustainable development indicator co-construction practices: the EVAD research project

Within the framework of the *Évaluation de la durabilité des systèmes aquacoles* (EVAD, ANR Agriculture and Sustainable Development project), a multidisciplinary research team designed a generic guide to practices aimed at facilitating the construction of sustainable development indicators for the aquaculture sector based on field research conducted in five countries representative of the diversity of aquaculture systems (France, Cyprus, Cameroon, Indonesia, Philippines). The guide proposes a co-construction scheme via partnership research based on the assumption that concerned stakeholders and a collective learning process are required for sustainable development to work. It jointly deals with the question of aquaculture farm sustainability and the contribution of aquaculture to sustainable territorial development.

The proposed approach enables users to develop indicators according to principles and criteria that account for the functioning of aquaculture production and regulation systems, as well as aquaculture areas and ecosystems. Representations and practices of stakeholders mobilised through surveys and focus groups can thus be the starting point for the classification of checklists drawn up and designed to be generic and applicable to all types of aquaculture systems.

The focus is on organizational and institutional conditions of the collective learning process. Indicator selection and development thus seems to represent a reflexive action and an intermediate 'mediator' feature to facilitate sustainable development.

The proposed guide is a decision support tool that, according to decentralised sustainable development implementation phases, (i) provides a tool for managing information and existing indicators, (ii) facilitates the appropriation of sustainable development through the co-construction of indicators, (iii) initiates the sustainable development institutionalization process through collective learning, and (iv) participates in strengthening conditions for the professionalization of sustainable development and governance associated with its territorial implementation as recommended in local agendas.

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## Comprehensive social science approaches

Comprehensive social science approaches are based on theory, but also on a data input method. The scientific aim is to develop contextual explanatory models of complex changing situations, involving heterogeneous stakeholders who meet and negotiate through different action logic combinations. These approaches consider actions and practices of social stakeholders (individual or collective), while accounting for their views on their situations and options open to them, their objectives, logics, motives, values and action principles to which they refer. From this perspective, they approach situations and facts that are analysed as derived from processes.

This process dimension of comprehensive approaches helps to unravel the complexity of social, political and economic relationships, and the institutions ('rules of the game') that underlie the organization. The choice of a comprehensive process-based approach thus orients contextualized research at different interaction levels, i.e. from national to local scales.

The results are interpreted from these different observation and analysis scales according to the research questions considered. In studies on land relationships (used here as an example), the empirical dataset used can thus combine a limited description of local microinteractions (e.g. in cases of intrafamilial land relationships or extrafamilial transfers), a broader description of mesoprocesses incorporating a portion of a broad interpretation (e.g. in cases of relationships between a village land area and the relationship dynamics between generations or 'local state' authorities), and a broad



*Interviewing livestock farmer-herders in Ferlo, Senegal*

interpretation of macroprocesses concerning institutional environmental elements (e.g. the legal set up, public policies and interventions in the land and migration fields, the history and political economics of agrarian changes, local ownership policies and identity issues).

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