

REINSTALLING THE AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEBATE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Edited by IPAR and
Leandro Echt¹

SENEGAL - 2012

INITIATIVE PROSPECTIVE AGRICOLE ET
RURALE (IPAR)

In the 2012 presidential elections in Senegal, the think tank Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale (IPAR) led a process of public hearings with the candidates to promote the debate on the country's economic development.

1. CONTEXT

Despite its central role in Senegal's economy, agriculture and the rural issues that surround it have systematically been excluded from public debate (Grupo FARO, 2012). In the 2012 presidential elections, IPAR developed an initiative aimed at reinstalling these topics in the political debate.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE INITIATIVE

The initiative pursued the following goals:

- Reinstall the debate on agriculture and rural issues at the heart of the electoral campaign;
- Sensitise and inform the media about the key issues surrounding the agricultural sector in this election;
- Increase the understanding of Senegalese citizens on the challenges surrounding agriculture.

1. The document adapts, complements and updates a previous systematisation effort of this initiative available at [Twelve stories of policy influence from Asia, Africa and Latin America: IPAR's Case: Agenda Setting During Presidential Elections in Senegal](#). This document counts on the collaboration of Ibrahima Hathie, Research Director, and Aminata Diop, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer at IPAR.

3. DESIGN OF THE INITIATIVE

The initiative considered five phases²:

- i. Identification of strategic policy issues and production of content.
- ii. Training workshops with the media to inform and raise awareness of journalists.
- iii. Organisation of an electronic forum to trigger the debate around the four strategic topics.
- iv. Organisation of a multi-stakeholder citizen's forum to engage directly with representatives of the candidates (campaign managers and their communication officers).
- v. Round of hearings with candidates through different media outlets (print, radio, TV).



Source: IPAR

4. GOVERNANCE AND ALLIANCES

To guarantee the impartiality of the initiative, terms of references were developed and validated by IPAR's Board members. These terms oriented the implementation of the project and served as a reference to orient its actions and make sure they were responding to the project's objectives.

The phases described in section 3 were developed in collaboration with various actors.

- i. **Farmers within a consortium of 28 peasant federations.** This group helped mobilise stakeholders in the agricultural world (from peasants to fishermen) to join the audiences with candidates.
- ii. **Civil society through a platform of 178 national civil society organizations.** This platform helped showcase the initiative and bring the attention of policy makers.
- iii. **Policymakers.** The participation of candidates and the collaboration of their campaign directories was key for the success of the forums.
- iv. **Media outlets (print press, public and community radios, and televisions).** The media helped spread information about the forums in their zones of influence thus reaching stakeholders who could be interested in joining the forums.

The alliances with peasant federations and the civil society organisations aimed “to form a solid panel of stakeholders that could be influential” (Grupo FARO, 2012, p. 39).

5. FINANCING OF THE INITIATIVE

The initiative was supported by core funds provided by the International Development Research Center (IDRC) through the Think Tank Initiative. IPAR also contributed with owned funds and the time of its human resources.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

Identification of strategic policy issues and production of content (June – December 2011)

IPAR identified four strategic agricultural and rural topics to feed the electoral debate: food security, agricultural employment, land reforms and agricultural funding. The policy briefs were developed from previous research conducted by IPAR staff, and included the main challenges within each topic and proposals to tackle them.

Trainings workshops with the media (December 2011)

The first stakeholder to be contacted and sensitise was the media. IPAR contacted community radios that could spread information in the rural area and let farmers know that they were interested in questions concerning

2. In 2012, Grupo FARO documented four phases of the project. This document introduces the identification of strategic policy issues and the production of content as the first phase of the initiative.

their situation to be made in the audiences with policy makers. For that purpose, IPAR trained around 30 journalists from several media on the four topics and shared the questions for the candidates so they were informed to participate in the audiences.

Organisation of an electronic forum (January - March 2012)

This forum was organised on issues and challenges related to food security and land governance in a context marked by large-scale land acquisitions and the food crisis. The specific objectives pursued were to share a long-term vision of agriculture and the rural world, discuss and analyse issues, difficulties and prospects around land tenure, youth employment and financing of agriculture and rural areas, and share and discuss farmer's proposals for land reforms and strategies of political backing. The forum was open to all citizens both resident in Senegal and those of the diaspora. The forum brought together 123 members, making possible to identify the different concerns of the Senegalese people and to make proposals to be shared during the hearings of candidates for the presidential election. The synthesis of these discussions was presented to the representatives of the candidates during the following citizen's forum.

Organisation of a multi-stakeholder citizen's forum (February 2012)

In collaboration with the consortium of farmers' organisation and the platform of civil society organisations, IPAR organised a new face to face forum which mobilised 130 representatives of peasant organisations, local elected officials, policymakers, private companies, donors and citizens (Grupo FARO, 2012). This second forum was an opportunity to engage directly with campaign managers and communication officers of seven presidential candidates, who presented their vision in agriculture and rural development. Each candidate representative had an equivalent time to present their proposals. The forum was moderated by a journalist recognised for his independence from all the candidates. Representatives also were exposed to a synthesis of questions that emerged in the electronic forum. Finally, the representatives established three main commitments of their candidates regarding the critical topics.

Rounds of hearings with candidates (February 2012)

In addition to the citizen's forum, IPAR conducted a hearing of all 14 candidates in the presidential elections, in partnership with the West Africa Democracy Radio (WADR) and the Union of community radios. Two main strategies were developed to engage presidential candidates and their representatives: official letters were sent to each candidate together with the policy briefs, and IPAR's Board members helped lobbying candidates. Some candidates sent their representatives to IPAR to further discuss some of the topics. During the second round of the elections, IPAR developed a questionnaire to orient WADR journalists who then interviewed the remaining candidates. Moreover, in partnership with the private media outlet TFM, experts from IPAR engaged in a debate with representatives of the two candidates, both in French and in Wolof, one of the main Senegalese languages.



Source: IPAR

7. RESULTS

Alliances

IPAR was able to bring together a cluster of organisations with shared views on the issues of agriculture and rural development, interested in using the opportunity brought about by the elections to promote evidence informed debates and policies (Grupo FARO, 2012).

Public debate

The multi-stakeholder platform for dialogue led by IPAR was able to bring agricultural and rural issues at the core of the policy debate during the electoral process (Grupo FARO, 2012). The long process of identifying strategic policy issues and gather and produce data allowed to engage different stakeholders in a broad evidence-informed debate and discuss candidates' programmes and proposals.

Candidates' proposals

The influence on the candidates was progressive through the process. Many of the candidates “began to refine their proposals to address the issues identified by IPAR and its partners” (Grupo FARO, 2012, p. 40). The President-elect pledged to increase public resources for agriculture, reform land tenure right from the start, create 500,000 jobs and achieve self-sufficiency in rice by 2017. Although these commitments were implemented, they have yet to be evaluated.

Candidates' commitments

The actions carried out during the electoral campaign led to several commitments by the different candidates, including the elected President. As documented by Grupo FARO, some of these commitments included “engaging the donor community as soon as he was elected as a response to the food crisis following a disastrous rainy season, and preparing the cropping season in a concerted way, thus allowing timely provision of inputs and setting a negotiated price for the main agricultural products” (2012, p. 40). Once in the government, the President worked for the materialization of these two promises.

At the organisation

The process allowed IPAR to gain visibility, further disseminate its research results and build relationships with members of the campaign team of the elected President who happened to play a key role in the government (Grupo FARO, 2012).

8. CHALLENGES

Positioning policy issues

Throughout the process, agricultural and rural issues competed with other policy issues that were advocated by well positioned stakeholders. Among these issues, good governance, education, health provision, youth employment and security in the south of Senegal had more attention from the population (Grupo FARO, 2012). In this context, the success of IPAR relied on a “well thought communication strategy built around allies with complementary skills” (Grupo FARO, 2012, p. 41).

Legitimacy and transparency of the organisation and the initiative

Promoting a debate between different stakeholders on strong political issues was challenging for a think tank that sought to maintain its independence and equal distance from the several positions. Two elements helped IPAR in this effort. On the one hand, IPAR's board composition, with well-known and respected actors in the sector of agriculture and rural development, was important in legitimising IPAR for this initiative. On the other hand, transparency throughout the process, an advocacy process supported with solid evidence, and the strategic alliances with legitimate partners, have been decisive to the credibility of the process (Grupo FARO, 2012).

9. LESSONS

PRE-ELECTORAL CONTEXT ANALYSIS

It is important to conduct a thorough analysis of the pre-electoral context. IPAR identified the citizenship's need and demand for open discussions on the candidates' proposals. Within this “favorable environment for policy influence”, IPAR “built its strategy on three key elements: planning, use of evidence based advocacy and partnership” (Grupo FARO, 2012, p. 41).

KEY INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ALLIANCES

Internal and external alliances are critical when seeking to engage presidential candidates in a public debate. The role of the Board members was critical to mobilise their networks of influencers. Building a broad civil society network and the partnership with media were also key strategies to raise the profile of the initiative and reach out the candidates.

COMPLEMENT WITH MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A monitoring tool to perform citizen watch of commitments may be interesting to put in place. Indeed, a sustained monitoring and evaluation strategy could help assess the level of fulfillment of the promises made during the electoral campaign.

REFERENCES

Ordoñez A.; Bellettini, O.; Mendizabal, E.; Broadbent, E. & Muller, J. (2012). “IPAR’s Case: Agenda Setting During Presidential Elections in Senegal”. In Twelve stories of policy influence from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Grupo FARO. Retrieved from: www.thinktankinitiative.org/sites/default/files/Compilation%20of%20Stories_0.pdf

Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale (IPAR) – Senegal

IPAR is a space for reflection, dialogue and proposals for cooperative agricultural and rural policies in Senegal and the West African region. The initiative was initiated by agricultural specialists and rural spaces already supporting farmers’ organisations and were interested in creating permanent spaces for prospective and strategic thinking.

Contact: Ms. Aminata Diop, Monitoring, evaluation and knowledge management officer:
Aminata.diop@ipar.sn

www.ipar.sn

www.facebook.com/IPARNEWS

@IPARSENEGAL

Electoral platforms: strengthening capacities to influence the electoral cycle
www.ilaipp.org/portfolio/plataformas-electorales
www.onthinktanks.org/eleccionesbuenaspracticas

