

LESSONS FROM COMMUNITY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN MALI

This working note presents a synthesis of lessons drawn by the Sahel ECO team in Mali from an analysis of their experience during implementation of the Community Resource Management Project¹ and other initiatives in the Mopti and Segou regions of Mali².

It draws on project reports and also on the evaluation processes undertaken in the Bankass and Tominian districts in the period November to December 2007. In each district an end of project evaluation was facilitated by an external consultant employing a variety of tools and approaches. Project beneficiaries, project staff, state technical and administrative services and other key stakeholders participated in the collection and analysis of information and in the formulation of recommendations. The consultants were each responsible for overseeing the evaluation process in their respective districts and for writing the final reports (in French).

This working note is intended to accompany other project reports and documents and its objective is addressed principally to the technical and financial partners and others already familiar with the project location, objectives, activities and achievements. The lessons, accompanied by additional information as appropriate, are presented in ten sections, as follows:

1. Water Supply
2. Natural resource management
3. Reducing vulnerability
4. Gender and diversity
5. Participation:
6. Capacity building:
7. Alliances, collaboration and networking:
8. Influencing opinion:
9. Sustainability
10. Outcomes

¹ SOS Sahel International UK, Community Resource Management Mali 2004-2007, Big Lottery Fund ref: IG/1/010115163. European Commission, Tominian Community Development Support Project

² Strengthening Capacity for Participation of Pastoralists (SOS Sahel UK, Comic Relief) and Mopti Trees for Change (Tree Aid UK)

1. COMMUNITY WATER SUPPLY

- ✓ **Adapt community based approaches so that they are in line with decentralisation policy:** At the start of the project we adapted the decision making process to take into account that the authority for village water supply has been transferred to the Communes as *Maitre d'Ouvrage* (literally Master of Works). We need to further adapt our approach to recognise existing commune level planning and budgeting processes and tools and in particular the Commune Social , Economic and Cultural Development Plan.

BUT AT THE SAME TIME

- ✓ **Work with decentralised structures to promote practices which are inclusive, participatory and transparent:** Our approach is in line with national Water Policy in that it is demand led and participatory. One of its key strengths is that it gives villagers a real sense of ownership of their well. In adapting to the context of decentralisation, we must maintain our focus on promoting the joint responsibility of communes, communities and civil society associations to plan, build and manage village water supply (even where this is not in line with current practice)

AND

- ✓ **Improve information on existing water points to support the decision making process:** The results of our inventory of modern water points highlighted the fact that communes are in general poorly informed about what water infrastructure exists and whether it is working or not. Official information is generally out of date and can mask inequalities in access. One commune with an overall coverage rate of 105% was nevertheless found to have 8 villages in critical need of a safe water supply.

We can further improve our approach if before the well is dug, we:

- ✓ **Recognise that women will play a key role in the day to day management of the water point and in adoption of good hygiene practices and adapt training and support accordingly:** Men tend to play a more active role during the construction period and project training and support focus on this. Hygiene and sanitation training is included but not given a very high priority. We should ensure there are more women on the committee and adapt training and support to their needs so that in the long term they can reduce the incidence of water related illness and promote the longevity of the infrastructure.
- ✓ **Collect information on depth to water table and the nature of subsoil from nearby wells and wells in neighbouring villages, to complete and verify information from local informants.** There was a tendency to rely entirely on information from local people and in particular, those with skills as water diviners. Asking Village Water and Hygiene Committee members to make a simple, quick cross check by collecting and recording data from nearby wells will give us more accurate and reliable information to use when budgeting.
- ✓ **Plan for the water needs of livestock:** almost all of the Water and Hygiene Committees negotiated directly with the artisan, to get him to install three livestock watering troughs instead of the two indicated on the plans

Then, during the construction period:

- ✓ **Contract an external technician to oversee the work of the well diggers.**
This was a good decision at the start of the project because it enabled us to :
 - Continue to work with and build capacity of local well diggers
 - Standardise construction methods and improve quality
 - Provide technical drawings and descriptions for communes to use in calls for tender

- ✓ **Keep funds in reserve and remain flexible, in order to deal with unexpected events.** On several occasion we had to revise the initially approved budgets for example, to:
 - ✓ Purchase and transport good quality gravel where this was not available near the village
 - ✓ Permit use of explosives after encountering unexpectedly hard subsoil
 - ✓ Deepen the well beyond the initially budgeted depth because of an inadequate discharge of water.

- ✓ **Use someone from outside the local project team to check that expenditure records and receipts are kept correctly.** Following an initial visit to Bankass by the Sahel ECO Accountant, we made him responsible for controlling the accounts held by the Village Water and Hygiene committees. This enabled the technical supervisor to focus on construction quality and local project staff to play a supportive, capacity building role. In the future the Accountant should also check that other contractual arrangements are being met.

- ✓ **Put a plaque on wells and other major infrastructure saying indicating who built and funded it, to ensure transparency.** During the project we had metal plaques fixed on every well dug with support from SOS Sahel UK and Sahel ECO since 1994. This decision followed a local scandal in which a commune official and entrepreneur conspired to pass off a well dug by another NGO as the one they had received funds to build, from the National Commune Investment Agency. In this case they were denounced to the National Audit Office and were obliged to repay the money they had embezzled.



Finally, once the well is completed

- ✓ **Ensure there is a formal reception of the well by the commune after completion :** as well as by the village

- ✓ **Ensure that the relevant technical service (the Regional Directorate of Water) is informed about the well so that it can update its statistics.** The commune should do this but if we also submit a report we can increase our visibility and that of our achievements

2. NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- ✓ **There is not a standard approach to Community Based Natural Resource Management which can be applied to all cases:** We are working on forest management issues in six sites in Ségou and Mopti regions. All started at different times, in different ways and for different reasons. Each has followed a different course. Some have progressed more quickly than others. The same observation applies to our work on livestock corridors in two districts. We see this as strength not a weakness. There are however common themes and elements such as :
 - A goal of sustainable management of a renewable natural resource which plays a crucial role in securing their livelihoods
 - The existence of an important threat: to the livelihood security of at least one group of resource users (e.g. fighting bush fires was the initial treat which united Farakunna member villages). The more visible or keenly felt the threat the easier it is to mobilise people to address it.
 - A champion, catalyser or initial activity which starts the process: in the past (the 90's) this was typically the "project". Today we have cases where resource users or other concerned stakeholders have approached us (e.g. the President of the District Council in Tominian, concerned about farmer-herder conflict).
 - A collective decision by key stakeholders to take action: this may be the starting point for our involvement (e.g. Barahogon member villages in Endé) but more typically occurs after we have facilitated a participatory process to enable the key stakeholders to analyse management issues and options and reach consensus on the action to take (e.g. Segue, Duwa, Sutèbwo, Koubaye and Samori forests)
 - A progressive, iterative approach which starts with the most visible or concerned individuals or interest groups and works with them to identify and gradually bring into the process other stakeholder groups.
 - A focus on the organisational and institutional aspects of resource management; on the legitimacy of actions, as well as the legality.

To work in this way you need to:

- ✓ **Recruit staff with good facilitation skills and train them if needed to understand the issues:** facilitation skills are more important than technical knowledge about forest or other natural resources. We need to make sure our own personnel have the knowledge, tools and other skills they need to facilitate or moderate a process and be able to adapt to different situations or make use of opportunities as they arise. We can hire technical support as required
- ✓ **Start by addressing the issue that most concerns people:** for example bush fires (villages around the Duwa), forest policing (the Alamodiou in Bankass), trees on agricultural land (Barahogon, Ende), pastoral resource use (Koubaye).
- ✓ **Differentiate between resources which can be managed at village and commune level and those for which an inter-commune or district level approach is required:** for each specific resource and situation, we consider which level is the lowest at which is appropriate to take a given management decision. For example :
 - **Choice of well site:** village level
 - **Choice of village to benefit from a well:** Commune level

- **Management of field trees:** Village level (conventions at inter-village or commune level strengthen village level decisions)
 - **Management of Tion Forest** – commune level (because all villages bordering the Tion forest are in the Tominian commune)
 - **Management of Duwa, Sutèbwo and Segue forest resources:** inter-commune level (because villages bordering the forest area are in different communes)
 - **Routes for livestock movements:** District level for the main corridors used by herds to cross the district; commune level for local movements of livestock and to join up with the main routes.
- ✓ **Where the process starts or is strongly led at commune or district level, ensure that communities and other resource users are brought into the process and fully involved:** The process may even need to be modified to allow for particular stakeholder groups “catch up” with others, in terms of information and engagement. During the evaluation in Tominian leaders of farmers and herders organisations expressed lower levels of satisfaction with the process to draw up Pastoral Resource Development Plan than District level government staff. Project staff said they felt that two fatal incidents between farmers and herders in 2007 were symptomatic of a need for greater consultation at community level before the plan is formally adopted
- ✓ **Where the process starts or is strongly led at community level make sure that the relevant communes are quickly brought into the process:** the four villages recognised as traditional “owners” or managers of the Koubaye forest area felt they alone should take decisions and then inform the communes afterwards. The commune officials said only they could take decisions legally. After a lot of debate, and some diplomacy, they agreed to joint decision making. Successful community management requires the participation of both customary and modern authorities (Box 1)
- BOX 1: “The surveillance by the [Alamodiou] associations supported by customary and local government authorities has contributed to an increase in the density of tree cover as was visible on the [agricultural] land of Leguere village, and guarantees availability of wood and non wood products. It has strengthened capacity to adapt to vulnerability caused by climatic variability mainly by maintaining the productive state of the soils which is favoured by the protection of existing trees, natural regeneration and individual tree planting”. From the report of the evaluation in Bankass*
- ✓ **Ensure communes and resident communities acknowledge herders and their livestock as legitimate users of forest resources and bring them into the management process.** This may be the case from the start (Koubaye) or may need to be brought about through a combination of meetings, training and action-research etc (Farakunna). We have shown it can be achieved for regular visitors and semi-resident herders who have social relations with villagers. Goat herders, who pass quickly though the forest on their way to markets in the south, are more difficult to control.
- ✓ **Formalise structures only as and when needed:** Don’t be in a hurry to formalise. Start for example with a “consultative forum” which can be enlarged as stakeholders are identified and management issues and options are analysed.
- ✓ **Know what law says and what the correct procedures are:** Don’t expect state administrative or technical service staff to necessarily know this. Double check yourself, provide information and follow up. Administrators in Bankass and Tominian had never before been faced with applications to register inter-

commune syndicates (the law was only voted in 2006). In Tominian the original application was eventually declared lost and had to be resubmitted. In Bankass the administrators approved the applications but did not apply the correct procedures, so the syndicates need to redo some parts of the process.

- ✓ **Pay attention also to management of trees growing on agricultural land:** the 1995 forestry code already gives farmers some rights to manage these trees, so outcomes are less affected by the delays in the transfer to communes, of authority for NRM. Benefits are more easily visible (Figure 1 and also Box 1) and anyway, it is the only solution for the very many villages which like Ende, don't have any forest land.



Figure 1: Women benefit from abundant supplies of firewood when the men in their households prune trees growing in their fields.

- ✓ **Nurture any signs of positive support from local forestry staff and build on this to develop good relations with the community:** this can be difficult, but in the absence of a transfer of authority to communes, it is the only way to promote community participation in the management of resources on forest land. It is better to find pragmatic ways to continue working together than not to work at all.
- ✓ **Enable foresters and communities to do things together:** this is a good way to foster better relations. In addition to attending training together, the forest officer in Tominian and leaders of Farakunna worked together, with technical and financial support from the project, to:
 - Elaborate local rules of access to forest resources
 - Carry out a simple inventory of the Duwa forest
 - Produce a map of limits of the Duwa forest (using GPS)
 - Designate fully protected areas (where no tree cutting is allowed)
 - Clear fire breaks
 - Plant tree seed and seedlings

- ✓ **Accept and develop strategies to deal the frequent transfers of forestry staff** for example:
 - Inform regional level staff about what you are doing and if possible, get them involved. They tend to be transferred less frequently
 - Brief the incoming officer and provide copies of all key documents. Our experience is that their predecessor will not do this. NB if someone you worked with locally gets transferred to a regional post and is still involved in the initiative, visit and brief him again (don't assume anything!)
 - Ensure local conventions and forest management plans are formally approved by government authorities at district and/or regional level. This makes it harder for incoming forest staff at all levels, to overturn agreements made by their predecessors.
 - Place forest management planning in the overall context of the commune development planning process

- ✓ **Provide opportunities and build the capacity of communes and community level organisations to recognise and address issues of corruption and other illegal practices** where these occur. Provide information and moral support, raise profiles and keep issues the agenda.



Figure 2: During celebrations of World Environment Day in June 2007, community leaders in Tion explained to a delegation headed by the Regional Forestry Director, how permits issued by his staff are being used to destroy their forest. Shown here is a felled Shea butter tree, a protected species.

3. REDUCING VULNERABILITY

- ✓ **Work with community associations and rural producer groups:** state rural extension services in Mali have to all extent and purposes disappeared with civil society organisations increasingly taking on the role of providing services to their members, including inputs, technical advice, marketing etc.
- ✓ **Build on traditional forms of solidarity and social relations:** Farakunna member villages were highly resistant to any suggestion that project activities might openly target the poorest households, pointing out that all households are vulnerable to illness, droughts, locusts etc. and stressing that “*Everyone needs to advance together*”
- ✓ **Help the association to use participatory planning techniques to develop work plans based on what members are already doing:** this requires flexible funding but also recognition that not everything can be funded. Our experience is that expressed needs focus on improving crops and livestock, water supply, trade, health and education. Make it clear if certain activities or sectors cannot be funded
- ✓ **Build into the plan, activities which introduce and try out new ideas and innovations:** such as exchange visits, training (on AIDS prevention for example), crop trials and demonstrations. Support follow-up activities and help the association members to evaluate the results. Be prepared that not everything will prove useful. Make sure that at least one person is actively searching for potential innovations (requires time, resources and contacts)
- ✓ **Use participatory tools to enable association leaders and members to monitor and evaluate who benefits:** then use the facts as a basis for discussion about how to modify an approach or introduce an activity, so that sections of the community are not excluded
- ✓ **Use or establish structures which are specifically set up to manage credit schemes:** Farakunna was set up because villagers were concerned about forest management. It is too risky for them to take on responsibility for management of the solidarity credit funds in the absence of external support and supervision. This lesson can also be applied to Sahel ECO's work. The type of loan scheme we set up is very popular because it quickly produces tangible benefits. We should either commit to making it sustainable (we require new financial and human resources to do this) or stop providing credit funds all together.
- ✓ **Provide sound information and advice for everyone about HIV and AIDS:** use specialised organisations with experienced staff to ensure that attitudes are positive and messages are correct. Health service personnel and project team members are in as much need of information as project beneficiaries and need to learn what messages to give and how to provide support.
- ✓ **Provide time and space for deeper discussions about HIV and AIDS:** Go beyond the prevention messages and enable people to get replies to their questions and get rid of any doubt they might have, that the threat is real. The thing people find hardest to accept is the message that they could be seropositive for a long time and show no signs. The practise they find hardest to address is the marriage of a woman to the brother of her deceased husband.
- ✓ **Develop strategies which recognise that there is still considerable stigma attached to HIV and AIDS:** People prefer to be tested in the regional town because of the fear of indiscretion by local health personnel. They are willing to

coming to the Sahel Eco office in Tominian because the reason for their visit is not apparent to anyone. They continue to do this even though a specialist AIDS programme has opened an office in Tominian.

- ✓ **Support the emergence of associations of people living with HIV in a very sensitive and discrete way, with no time constraints on the process.** We started by providing a small amount of money (less than £5) for people to travel to the regional town where they can obtain counselling, testing, free anti-retroviral treatment and practical advice and support. Two groups exist and meet regularly, but only one has registered as an association.

4. GENDER AND DIVERSITY

- ✓ **Promote strategies which help women to take their place as “equal but different” participants in the development process:** a Women’s commission, a Women’s President and women-only training sessions have increased the voice of women within Farakunna.: Other strategies we used include:
 - A variety of approaches to training and learning (residential or community based) so that each woman can choose the one suits her best
 - techniques which able women to speak freely (focus groups etc) during planning sessions and other meetings
 - support for activities which mainly interest women (marketing of non timber forest products)

5. PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

- ✓ **Exploit the fact that people place a high value on good social relations:** Farakunna’s initial position was that pastoralists need only be informed about forest management decisions. They later agreed that this would aggravate conflict and accepted to work with them. Farakunna rejected as divisive any suggestion that loans should openly target the poorest households. At the end of the project, activities are perceived as benefiting all sections of the community and to have contributed to strengthening social capital
- ✓ **Promote a culture of democratic leadership and inclusion within local organisations:** ensure members are eligible for office without segregation on ethnic or social lines and monitor whether this is respected. Ensure re-election of management bodies takes place as in the statutes and monitor the changing profile of the leadership (age, sex, education level etc)
- ✓ **Use techniques and tools that promote participation:** focus groups, local languages, statutory places etc. During the final evaluation in Bankass each of the eleven participating villages was represented by one man and one woman at the final meeting. Delegates from the District Coordination of herders associations were also invited to attend
- ✓ **Adapt your approach in response to the needs of particular groups:** Peul speaking communities in Bankass could not hold literacy training sessions during the daytime, due to the occupations of the men (herding and watering livestock) and women (selling milk). The project responded by supplying paraffin lamps to enable sessions to be held in the evening.
- ✓ **Provide information and develop indicators which enable staff and local people to assess levels of participation and inclusion:** An inventory of

modern water points enabled commune leaders in Bankass to target communities which not yet benefitted from any investment in water supply.

- ✓ **Look beyond the number of places, to who participates in what and how decisions are actually taken:** Guaranteeing places for women on the Farakunna committee did not remove all the barriers to their attendance. The final evaluation found that natural resource management associations in Bankass had consulted with and taken into account the concerns of women when setting rules for management of fruit trees. They also fixed the start and end dates of the agricultural season, by consensus with the herders.

6. CAPACITY BUILDING:

- ✓ **Sustainable benefits require a long term investment in building human and social capital:** We already knew this, but need to find ways to provide long term accompaniment to all partner organisations such as Farakunna and Hiroson. The way we work with them will evolve as their own organisation capacities develop and their support needs change.
- ✓ **Changes in organisational capacities can be assessed:** the participatory tools we used at the start and end of the project provided useful information about outcomes but need careful facilitation. We should provide staff with training opportunities so that they can continue to improve their facilitation skills.
- ✓ **Literacy and local language literacy in particular, is the foundation to capacity building.** We can support this by developing a “culture of literacy”, by distributing booklets widely (not just to village leaders), by combining literacy with civic education, and by using the Reflect approach to develop community learning groups.
- ✓ **Put the onus on the beneficiaries to demonstrate their interest in training:** The herder’s cooperatives in Tominian initially asked for literacy training but did not submit the required list of participants. The session was cancelled.

7. NETWORKING AND RELATIONSHIPS

- ✓ **Build networks and relationships by “doing things together”:** New umbrella organisations in both Bankass and Tominian emerged after the project had invited different civil society organisations to attend training courses together. Joint training courses also helped Farakunna develop relations with herders associations, commune officials and state technical services.
- ✓ **Help local organisations to develop links to regional and national level organisations:** coordination groups in Bankass have increased the visibility of the farmer, herder and inter-community associations and made it easier for them to receive invitations to regional and national level meetings and workshops.

“Managing the forest together has put an end to the bad relations that existed between some villages” declared one of the people interviewed during the final evaluation in Tominian

8. INFLUENCING OPINION

- ✓ **Use action-research to develop and test innovative approaches then collect and communicate evidence about outcomes:** but recognise that this alone is not enough to change policy and practices when there are vested interests at stake.
- ✓ **Keep communication channels open with the forestry service:** by developing a pragmatic relationship with them, going to meetings and working on the issues which they raise. We supported work by the National Directorate of Nature Conservation on management of the Samori forest, because it gave us a legitimate reason to continue talking to them, even though we did not have high expectations about the outcomes.
- ✓ **Build the capacity of local actors, commune officials and civil society associations, to engage directly in policy dialogue and push for reforms.** Decentralisation requires a fundamental shift in power relations between state civil servants and local communities, and a significant reduction in authority and income for individual foresters and for the Nature Conservation Service as a whole. Frustration at delays combined with information about rights, has resulted in increased engagement in policy debate by commune officials in Bankass. *“Power doesn’t give itself away, it gets taken”.*
- ✓ **Increase profile and voice by working within networks of NGOs and other organisations with similar objectives:** informal networks have the advantage that they can be kept ticking over with a minimum of activities (or even go into hibernation) and quickly spring into action when opportunities arise to influence.

9. SUSTAINABILITY

- ✓ **Develop a strategy and draw up joint plans for the progressive transfer of responsibilities:** during the process of transfer of responsibilities from SOS Sahel UK to Sahel ECO, it was very useful to have a clear plan of what needed to be done and by whom. It acted as a basic check list and made it easier to monitor progress, even following staff changes in the UK. In 2004 the project team in Tominian shared with Farakunna their strategy to progressively hand over responsibility to them. This clarified mutual expectations and gave a direction and objectives to capacity building activities.
- ✓ **Transfer resources or the capacity to secure them, as well as tasks and responsibilities:** the project team helped Farakunna to evaluate their core costs and to develop a variety of internal fundraising strategies as well as to develop relationships with other partners. Ongoing contracts with SOS Sahel since 2005, have given Sahel ECO time and opportunities to develop relationships with FAO, Tree Aid and IIED, although no additional staff or resources were available, which created a heavy workload alongside project implementation.

10. MEASURING OUTCOMES

- ✓ **Explain clearly the concepts and terminology used by donor organisations so that staff can communicate more effectively:** a particular challenge in francophone countries where terms such as “livelihoods” “empowerment” and “outcomes” don’t translate easily. A training session on the “livelihoods framework” was organised for staff in Tominian in 2006.
- ✓ **Choose outcome indicators which might feasibly show some changes by the end of the project –** it is only within the last few years that changes in the availability and distance to collect fuel wood in Endé - outcomes of the Bankass Environment Project (1998-2002) – have become easy to see (Figure 1).
- ✓ **Avoid outcome indicators which are closely linked to something completely outside the project control :** i.e. adoption of a law to transfer authority for NRM to communes
- ✓ **Combine participatory exercises in groups with individual interviews and surveys:** during the final evaluation in Tominian, this helped to triangulate and thus to validate findings. It also brought out differences of opinion and minority views, and reached people not closely involved in project activities. We hired non-project people to help the consultant administer questionnaires.
- ✓ **Ask open questions about outcomes - many are unexpected:** we could not have predicted that the well in Tissagou would have led to more young women agreeing to get married and settle in the village. One of the main benefits of improved tree management is an abundant supply of fodder (Figure 3)



Figure 3: Grass from the forest is cut and carried to the village. An abundant supply of fodder is one of the key outcomes of better forest management