



making
decentralisation
work



Making decentralisation work for sustainable natural resource management in the Sahel

Lessons from a programme of
action-research, policy debate
and citizen empowerment



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*For the second phase of the MDW programme, AREN is the institutional home of the network in Niger

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Acronyms

AECD	National association of journalists in environment and development (Senegal) (<i>L'Association des Communicateurs en Environnement et Développement</i>)
ARED	Associates in Research and Education for Development
AREN	<i>Association pour la Redynamisation de l'Elevage au Niger</i>
CCC	Local municipal advisory centre (<i>Centre de Conseil Communal</i>)
CEFRAP	<i>Centre d'Études de Formation et de Réalisations Agropastorales</i>
CEK	<i>Cabinet d'Etudes Keita</i>
CILSS	Permanent Interstate Committee to Combat Drought in the Sahel (<i>Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse au Sahel</i>)
CND	National decentralisation committee (<i>Commission Nationale de Décentralisation</i>)
CVGT	Village land management commission (<i>Commission Villageoise de Gestion du Terroir</i>)
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DED	German development service (<i>Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst</i>)
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
GLEM	Working group on decentralisation at local level (<i>Groupe Local d'Etude et de Mobilisation</i>)
GRAF	Research and action network focusing on land rights (<i>Groupe de Recherche et d'Action sur le Foncier</i>)
GREM	Working group on decentralisation at regional level (<i>Groupe Régional d'Etude et de Mobilisation</i>)
IED Afrique	<i>Innovations, Environnement et Développement en Afrique</i>
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
KIT	Royal Tropical Institute
MARP	<i>Méthode Active de Recherche et de Planification Participative</i>
MDD	Decentralisation and deconcentration task force (<i>Mission de décentralisation et déconcentration</i>)
MDW	Making Decentralisation Work
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMAES	<i>Oeuvre Malienne d'Aide à l'Enfance du Sahel</i>
PACAD	<i>Project d'Appui à la Coordination des Actions de Développement</i>
PM&E	Participatory monitoring and evaluation
ROPPA	Network of West African farmers and agricultural producers (<i>Le Réseau des organisations paysannes et de producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest</i>)
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
SWAC	The Sahel and West Africa Club
TVE	Television Trust for the Environment

1. Introduction

Many hopes and fears are riding on the successive waves of decentralisation sweeping across the Sahel over the past ten years. These expectations are fuelled by promises of greater efficiency in the delivery of appropriate services tailored to local needs, coupled with the furtherance of local democracy and democratisation, better management of natural resources and the more active involvement of local people in the management of their affairs. Together, these benefits are expected to contribute significantly to poverty reduction through better representation of the poor and improved targeting of service delivery.

Making Decentralisation Work (MDW), a regional programme of action-research, capacity building and policy debate, is designed specifically to contribute to this radical agenda of institutional reform in the Sahel.¹ Implemented by IIED's Drylands programme in partnership with a range of Sahelian organisations, the programme seeks to build the conditions whereby local people are better able to seize the opportunities offered by decentralisation to improve their livelihoods through more equitable, sustainable and effective management and use of natural resources, on which so many of them depend.

Particular attention is given to building the capacity of civil society to play an effective role in influencing local and national decision-making processes while ensuring that government reforms keep on track. Consideration is paid to working with poor and socially marginalised people; particularly women and pastoral communities, to help them articulate their aspirations and ensure decision-makers hear and listen to their concerns. Equally, programme activities build the capacity of local institutions, particularly elected government bodies, to apply inclusive and accountable procedures in the management of local affairs. Although particular emphasis is placed on activities at local government level and below, lessons from these micro-level activities are used to inform national policy.

The first phase of MDW spanned four years (1999-2004), with activities being implemented with numerous partners at different levels in four countries (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Senegal). A wealth of information has been generated not only on the relevance and impact of the programme's work, but the decentralisation reforms themselves. At the start of the programme,

1. DANIDA and Sida jointly funded phase I of the programme (October 1999 to December 2004). Core support to phase II (2005-2010) is provided by Sida.

Mali had just elected its first generation of mayors thereby embarking on a bold experiment, which has significantly redefined the relationship between the State and its citizens. By the end of phase I, Niger had successfully held its first countrywide local government elections in July 2004 and Mali had gone through a second round of local municipal elections. Burkina Faso has chosen the departmental approach for rural decentralisation whereby rural communes will be based on existing departments and it is expected that elections will be held in April 2006.²

In all countries, governments accompanied decentralisation reforms with a parallel process of sector-based policy and legislative change, amending existing laws or passing new ones to ensure their consistency with the spirit and objectives of decentralisation. Although these institutional reforms vary across countries and in many cases harbour considerable problems of a conceptual and practical nature, they nonetheless constitute an important step forward. A major issue yet outstanding in many Sahelian countries is that of devolved authority. There is still a marked reluctance by central government to transfer real powers to lower levels, arguing that they are not yet ready to assume control and manage resources in a responsible and effective manner. Such tensions between central and local level institutions are inherent in all countries north and south, but especially marked where local government is so recently established. But here too, we are seeing some progress albeit slow.

Fostering local and national processes to support good governance of natural and other resources is a complex and long-term process demanding a step-by-step approach to create the underlying conditions for sustainable and equitable development and poverty reduction in the Sahel. Central to this process is the full and active engagement of citizens in the on-going reforms, and this has been the focus of the 1st phase of the MDW programme. Activities have centred on three inter-linked thematic areas:

- Empowering local people to understand the issues at stake with decentralisation and play a more informed and effective role in local decision-making processes that affect their lives.
- Building participatory institutions at local level by strengthening their capacity to respond to local need and priorities.
- Ensuring practice informs policy through collaborative action-research and networking activities at local, national and regional levels.

2. At the time of going to press, Burkina Faso had successfully elected its first generation of rural local government bodies.

This publication documents the main findings of the first phase of work. It presents the key challenges underpinning the decentralisation process in the Sahel (section 2), particularly as they relate to land and natural resource management, as well as the main lessons learnt and issues arising from each of the programme's activities (sections 3 to 8). An analysis of the pertinence of the programme's activities and approach, in the face of the challenges of the decentralisation process, is presented in section 9 followed by brief presentation of the objectives and activities to be pursued in the second phase of the programme (2005-10).

2. The challenges of decentralisation

Decentralisation *per se* will not improve the efficiency or effectiveness of service delivery, improve governance or local participation, or ensure better natural resource management. Nor will it necessarily contribute to poverty reduction. It does, however, offer a broad institutional framework within which these benefits might be achieved subject to a number of key conditions.

Condition 1: The full and active involvement of all citizens in the process. To date, central governments have largely driven and controlled the decentralisation reforms in the Sahel, even though urban civil society groups and opposition political parties often instigated the process, demanding a radical redefinition of the relationship between the State and its citizens (in Mali and Niger, for example, decentralisation was one of the major recommendations arising from the National Conferences of the 1990s) (Mback, 2004). Yet, if the current reforms are to realise their potential, all citizens have to appropriate the process to ensure that the formal, legal provisions, set up by the State, are fully implemented and in a way which truly reflects the spirit of decentralisation. To do this, they need a thorough understanding of the key legal provisions within decentralisation laws aimed at ensuring that local government bodies are accountable to and involve their constituents. They have to understand the issues at stake, and how they can participate in and influence the local decision-making processes that affect their lives and livelihoods (e.g. land use planning processes, resource allocation for service delivery). Fundamentally, local people need to believe in the reforms and the opportunities they offer, and feel that they have the capacity to play a meaningful role and hold local government to account over the manner in which local affairs are managed. Special attention is required to ensure equitable participation by all citizens, including marginal and vulnerable social groups such as mobile pastoralists, women, youth, castes and migrants.

Realising this condition is a major challenge. Poverty and high levels of illiteracy, particularly in rural areas and among certain groups such as women, impede the active participation of local people. They do not have the luxury to invest time in informing themselves of the provisions of decentralisation. In many cases, the information is unavailable at their level, or if it is, it is in a format or language they do not understand. Attempts made by governments to inform their citizens are faced with huge logistical challenges due to limited communication infrastructure and resources (see box 1).

Involving marginal groups is even more problematic, requiring a fundamental review of enduring power relations that are often enshrined in long-standing customary and/or religious practice, and sometimes deep-rooted prejudice. The situation is further complicated by the degree of differentiation that often exists within these groups, according to wealth or political affiliation, which affects their readiness and capacity to act in solidarity and to create the kind of political leverage needed to influence policy effectively.

Building the capacity of citizens to participate in and appropriate the process of decentralisation is thus a complex and slow process that has to be driven from within society if lasting change is to be achieved. It involves not only acquiring information, but also changing attitudes and behaviour. This takes time as well as appropriate support, and is an area in which phase I of MDW invested considerable resources (see sections 4 and 5).

Box 1: Mobilising popular support

Winning the hearts and minds of local people was a key feature of the decentralisation process in Mali, partly to counter strong resistance for the reforms from the civil service who were highly sceptical of its feasibility or indeed its desirability. Working groups on decentralisation were established at local (GLEM) and regional (GREM) levels. Composed of representatives from government line ministries and civil society groups they provided a forum for debate on the proposed reforms and a “sounding board” for the decentralisation and deconcentration task force (MDD) set up to pilot the process. In spite of many shortcomings, including the limited participation of local people, the GLEMs and GREMs did play a key role in disseminating information on the reform process.

Source: KIT, 2004

Condition 2: The willingness and ability of newly elected local government bodies to apply principles of good governance and deliver appropriate, cost-effective and affordable services to their constituents. Under the provisions of decentralisation, local government bodies (councils) are legally responsible for delivering social and economic services (health, water, education, marketing, etc.), and for drawing up local land use plans for agricultural, pastoral, forestry and other uses.³ According to the law, they are expected to do this in a consultative and equitable manner, ensuring the full participation of the communities under their jurisdiction.

In the short-term, the success of decentralisation in the Sahel largely hinges on the degree to which local people see that it delivers tangible benefits. Given current poverty levels, they are less concerned with the principles and potential benefits of democratic governance than with seeing action taken to address their everyday problems of poor health and education facilities, inad-

3. The range of responsibilities that have been, or will be, transferred from the central State to local government varies from one Sahelian country to the next.

equate water supplies, lack of employment, marketing and investment opportunities, impassable roads, etc. If locally elected governments cannot deliver on these issues, their legitimacy and ability to effect structural changes in the manner in which local affairs are managed will be severely compromised.

Box 2: Council advisory centres

Local council advisory centres (CCC) have been established to help rural councils in Mali draw up local development plans in a participatory way, budget their expenditure and monitor activities. Although managed by external operators such as national or international NGOs, they still face many challenges. Set up by the national coordination unit within the ministry of territorial administration and local authorities, they are constrained by central planning processes and the use of generic tools, which are not necessarily tailored to meet local specificities. Questions have also been raised about how and when they will be phased out given high levels of turnover among municipal staff and the amount of work still needing to be done.

Source: KIT, 2004.

In practice, local councillors face significant conceptual and practical difficulties in meeting these challenges and carrying out their tasks.⁴ Paying for the cost of local development and service delivery, particularly in remote rural areas of the Sahel, is a major issue. Although the State and the donor community will continue to meet most of these costs, in the longer term, predictable and stable income sources will need to be found at the local level. In the foreseeable future, this will

necessarily involve raising revenue from natural resources such as forests and forest products, as these are a major source of income and wealth for the majority of people in the Sahel. Yet, this needs to be done in a responsible manner and according to minimum environmental standards. Reconciling long-term objectives of sustainable resource management with immediate development and poverty reduction targets requires sound understanding of the dynamics of, and interaction between, multiple local livelihood systems dependent on natural resources.

Furthermore, as land, particularly high-value land (urban and peri-urban areas, wetlands in drylands) becomes increasingly scarce provoking resource-based conflicts between and within groups, new institutional mechanisms are required to regulate mounting competition for this resource by different groups.

Building the capacities of local government to meet these challenges and to operate in a participatory, transparent and accountable manner is critical to their success in gaining the confidence and recognition of local people, and, in time, to developing and strengthening their fiscal autonomy (i.e. through

4. Illiteracy is a major problem in this regard. In Senegal and Mali over 70% of elected councillors are illiterate, yet nearly every document regulating formal council business is in French.

local revenue collection in the form of taxes, user fees, licences, etc.). In many cases, however, they either lack or have yet to master the tools and approaches needed to design, implement and monitor a council-level development plan. Many councillors have no experience of conducting participatory planning processes or budget setting before their election. Furthermore, many of the tools that they are trained to use do not explicitly address issues of equity or the fact that rural communities are often highly differentiated. As a result, they fail adequately to address the specificities of certain social groups, such as women, youth or mobile herders. This has resulted in inappropriate service delivery models and inappropriate land use planning, which has led to the further exclusion of these groups to key resources, particularly land, exacerbating their poverty and fuelling conflict.

Although they are essential, practical tools and procedures are not sufficient to ensure the accountability and legitimacy of local government bodies. Local councillors and other government officials need to believe in democratic principles, while local people need to exert constant upward pressure on councillors to ensure that they practice principles of good governance. Such pressures are critical, given that many rural councils are frequently dominated by local elites such as customary leaders, businessmen or former civil servants, who often represent the dominant political parties and are more intent on pursuing short-term political or economic agendas than policies and development activities for the common good. The elite capture of local government bodies by customary authorities or the dominant political party is major issue in the Sahel representing an appropriation of the democratic process by the “old guard” effectively denying rural people of their civic rights as citizens (Ouédraogo, 2004).

Building the capacities of both local people and local government authorities to apply inclusive and accountable procedures in local decision-making over the management of public resources is an area in which MDW I invested considerable attention (see section 5 in particular).

Condition 3: The readiness and capacity of the central State to provide a favourable institutional framework, which empowers local-level decision-making and authority. The legal provisions for endorsing and supporting a process of self-determination by locally elected government bodies vary considerably from one country to the next. Generally, the different decentralisation laws allow for the creation of legally recognised local government bodies with their own budget, personnel and estate, and with decision-making powers over a range of matters that directly concern their jurisdiction. In most cases, these laws recognise the principle of subsidiarity and the need to

ensure that a simultaneous transfer of funds accompanies the devolution of responsibility. They also acknowledge the right of local authorities to establish agreements for development cooperation with other public and private bodies, including the delegation of some of their powers to legally recognised village authorities, individuals and other professional bodies.

In practice, however, many of these policy commitments to devolved responsibility and authority are not operational, as central governments have been slow to draw up the necessary implementing regulations and decrees. This is particularly noticeable with respect to the transfer of discretionary decision-making powers and resources regarding land and other natural resources – which are the major sources of wealth and income in the Sahel.⁵ Failure to devolve meaningful authority over these resources to local government not only compromises the economic viability of local government, but also undermines the very legitimacy of the decentralisation process in the eyes of local people. A key area requiring central government support is the establishment of environmental standards setting out the broad contours of local discretionary action while ensuring a minimum level of protection of the environment for the nation as a whole as well as conformity with international conventions and treaties.

A second problem is the piecemeal approach to institutional reform adopted by many Sahelian governments, resulting in considerable confusion and contradictions between specific sectoral laws and the provisions made by decentralisation regarding areas such as land management and natural resource management. In recent years the situation has improved as governments slowly amend existing laws or pass new ones more in keeping with the provisions of decentralisation (e.g. Mali's pastoral Code which explicitly recognises the role of rural councils in the management of pastoral resources such as livestock corridors). Many sectoral reforms, however, stop short of empowering local government or communities in the design and implementation of their own rules and regulations, particularly with respect to natural resource management. Rights to define management rules and enforce their use through sanctions usually remain in the hands of State departments, while local government bodies and communities are only authorised to manage resources in line with these provisions. This centralised control is a constraint to effective and creative solutions for decentralised resource management; although, in practice, many rural councils and community groups use mechanisms such as local conventions to undertake de facto

5. In Mali, for instance, the devolution of discretionary decision-making powers over land and natural resources is still not operational, despite parliamentary approval of the necessary legislation.

decentralised resource management activities, often in collaboration with government technical services.

Finally, there are few institutional mechanisms, beyond Parliament, that really allow local people and civil society groups to participate effectively in the design, implementation and monitoring of national policies and legislation. Given the relatively unproven nature of rural decentralisation in the Sahel,⁶ it is essential to track the process and progress of decentralisation on the ground and feed this material back into national-level policy design processes, to ensure that policies are informed by local practices.

Policy-oriented research and the dissemination of its findings to facilitate informed debate on design and implementation of appropriate policies in support of local and responsible decision-making has been a key feature of the programme's work over the past four years (see sections 6, 7 and 8).

6. Apart from Senegal, where rural decentralisation was introduced in 1972.

3. Programme approach and strategy

Achieving these three conditions in the Sahel requires a long-term commitment. Decentralisation is taking place against a backdrop of democratisation, structural adjustment, economic liberalisation and sector-based policy reforms, and within national contexts of high rural illiteracy, weak institutional capacity in both the public and private sectors, rising poverty and socio-economic disparities between the rich and the poor, and increasing competition particularly for land and other high-value resources. It is also taking place in a regional context characterised by conflict.⁷ The political dimension of decentralisation, requiring a major redistribution of power and responsibility from the State to other actors at different levels, further complicates the process.

Resolving issues of power is central to making decentralisation work. In the first phase of the programme, activities have focused on improving the capacities of civil society and local and national government authorities to address existing power imbalances within and between them and other actors, particularly as they relate to the governance of natural resources. Under this broad objective, the programme implemented a series of activities within three inter-linked thematic areas, which mirror the three core conditions outlined above.⁸

- **Theme 1:** Empowering local people to understand the issues at stake with decentralisation and play a more informed and effective role in local decision-making processes that affect their lives.
- **Theme 2:** Building participatory institutions at local level by strengthening their capacity to respond to local need and priorities.
- **Theme 3:** Practice informing policy through collaborative action-research and networking activities at local, national and regional levels.

For each of these thematic areas, a range of implementation strategies were used:

Training in national languages. Illiteracy among rural people in general, and the more marginalised groups in particular, such as women, is a major contributing factor of their exclusion from local and national decision-making fora,

7. While some of them are or have been resolved (Liberia, Sierra Leone, eastern Niger), new ones have emerged (Côte d'Ivoire) undercutting the potential benefits of decentralisation for poverty reduction.

8. In the original programme document, the thematic areas were called the programme components.



Photo: Bara Gubye

Participants developing the Ngiagagniao rural community map

and thereby their levels of poverty. During the 1st phase of the programme, work undertaken by ARED⁹ led to the design, testing and finalisation of a training course in a local language (Pulaar) aimed at building the capacities of pastoral people to influence local government decision-making processes.

Learning groups. Learning Groups are a “tool” to help different actors with a shared interest in a common issue or resource, but often from a different perspective, discuss their respective positions from an informed standpoint and agree on a way forward. These groups are particularly useful for reconciling divergent positions between different actors over shared resources and, if properly managed, do provide a very powerful instrument for addressing issues of conflict, equity and sustainable resource management. Through this approach, it is possible to create the conditions for informed dialogue at different levels – local, national and regional. During the 1st phase of the programme, this tool was designed, tested and applied principally in Senegal and, to a lesser extent Mali and Burkina Faso, to explore three thematic issues: participatory budgeting, participatory monitoring and evaluation of decentralisation and gender and decentralisation.

9. ARED, based in Senegal, is an NGO specialising in non-formal education in African languages.

Regional action research is another important element of the programme's approach. A number of generic themes common to all four countries were identified during implementation of the 1st phase of the programme: the dynamics of land tenure and resource access, local conventions, pastoral legislation and the future of family farming.

Networking at local, national and regional levels is the fourth implementation strategy. In Phase I, the programme established national networks in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, which contributed to facilitating informed debate between actors at the national and local levels and, to a lesser extent, between actors at the regional level. The programme also facilitated dialogue and exchange between the national networks at a regional level.

Information and communication. In Phase I, the programme focused on establishing a platform for the exchange of information at a regional level, while providing some support to the information requirements of the national networks.

Table 1 below presents a summary of programme activities by implementation strategy according to the three thematic areas and corresponding core conditions for making decentralisation work.

Table 1: Summary of programme activities by implementation strategy and theme

	Condition 1: Citizen participation	Condition 2: The practice of good governance by local government bodies	Condition 3: Favourable institutional framework
Training in national languages	Design and testing of training course on pastoralism and policy in <i>Pulaar</i> with pastoral associations and community groups in Senegal and Niger.	Testing of training course on pastoralism and policy in <i>Pulaar</i> with local government officials in Senegal. Testing the French version of the training in Mali and Niger.	Making of a video on training process for policy makers.
Learning groups	Three learning groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Participatory budgeting in two rural councils in Senegal ■ Participatory monitoring and evaluation in three rural councils in Senegal and Mali ■ Gender and decentralisation in three rural councils in Senegal and Burkina Faso 		
Regional action-research	Thematic working groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Five studies on changing dynamics of land tenure and resource access ■ Two videos and three case studies on local conventions. ■ Studies on the Future of Family Farming 	Studies and workshops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ International workshop on "Making land rights more secure" ■ Praia+9 ■ Regional conference on local conventions ■ Studies on the Future of Family Farming ■ Video on land and resource conflict in Burkina Faso ■ Thematic conferences on rural communalisation, land tenure, in Burkina Faso
Networking		District and council level "networks" in Senegal and Niger.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Three national networks in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger ■ Multiple studies and meetings carried by networks ■ Annual meetings for networks to exchange experience
Information and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Local language journal in Senegal ■ Two videos in local languages in Senegal 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Website site ■ <i>Seg Taaba</i> newsletter ■ Drylands Issue Paper series ■ Local Conventions series ■ Three national network newsletters

4. Training in national languages

Pastoral and agro-pastoral marginalisation

Although decentralisation offers local people the chance to influence local decision-making processes over how their areas should be developed, these reforms also bring many threats and challenges. This is particularly true for pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in the Sahel whose livelihood systems are poorly understood by policy makers at both national and local levels. Despite sound empirical research demonstrating the economic and ecological viability of pastoralism in an environment characterised by scarce and erratic rainfall, many policy makers continue to consider it an inefficient and environmentally destructive form of land use. Furthermore, pastoral groups are rarely represented on local government bodies, and lack the skills to challenge prejudicial attitudes and influence local and national decision-making processes affecting their lives. Even in areas where pastoral people are a majority, the situation is not necessarily any better. Rural councils are often dominated by local elites such as customary leaders, retired politicians, businessmen, or former civil servants who, despite coming from a pastoral background, tend to use their powers to pursue their own short-term political and economic agendas rather than policies and development activities for the common good. Because of these factors, social and economic services are often inaccessible to mobile pastoralists, and inappropriate land use planning has led to the loss of pastoral lands to agriculture and other uses. In many cases, this has restricted herd mobility and exacerbated conflict between “farmers” and “herders”.

Building the capacity of pastoralists and their associations to influence local and national level decision-making processes is crucial to securing their access to natural resources and other key services (especially health and education). This involves creating the conditions whereby they develop the skills and confidence to challenge negative perceptions held by others of their livelihood systems, and to articulate a vision of their development according to their own values and priorities.

Education for self-determination

In 2000, ARED, started a process to develop and test a training module on pastoralism and policy in the Sahel specifically designed to enable ordinary pastoral people to articulate and defend their livelihood systems to outsiders such as local government officials and NGO project workers. The training module, designed in *Pulaar*,¹⁰ was adapted from an earlier version designed

10. *Pulaar*, also known as *Fulfulde*, is a language spoken by roughly 25 million people across the West and Central African region (from Senegal to Cameroon) with significant dialectal variations.

and implemented in French for well-educated development practitioners and policy makers.¹¹

However, developing a locally appropriate training course in *Pulaar* on issues as complex as pastoralism and policy is a lengthy process which took four years to complete. It involved a team of editors, linguists and trainers who, working closely with the creator of the original French training, had first to adapt and subsequently field-test each step and component of the training with local communities. The work consisted of adapting the content of the training as well as the manner in which it is delivered (the pedagogic approach). It was critical that the training not only responded to local people's priorities and be accessible to all groups (literate and non-literate participants, women and men, and young and old people), but that it enabled them to make the argument for pastoralism to often sceptical or even hostile policy makers. To achieve these objectives, four guiding principles were used in the design and testing process (see box 3).

Box 3: The pedagogic principles underpinning the training

- **Self Discovery.** A core objective of the training is to help pastoral communities structure their knowledge base, rather than “teach them”. Although new scientific and legal information is introduced throughout the course whenever pertinent, it is always after the participants have analysed and presented their own vision or interpretation. New information is therefore added onto a structure which is fully understood, rather than being the basis of the training itself. Furthermore, the trainers take great care not to present themselves as the “experts” who have the answers to the questions; in spite of many attempts at the beginning of each training to get them to play this role.
- **Bringing together participants of various backgrounds.** Contrary to customary practice where it is unusual for men and women, youth and elders, and literate and illiterate people to participate together in public debate, this course actively seeks to bring these groups during the training. Sharing information and knowledge are critical features of the course and as such it is essential to have everyone's point of view. Often women have a different perspective on livestock health than men, while elderly men remember earlier periods when pasture conditions were different to those of today.
- **Using visuals.** Given high levels of rural illiteracy, it is essential to develop materials that everyone can use as a memory aid, but which do not depend on being able to read.
- **Small group work and reporting to plenary.** Working in small groups helps foster peer group learning processes while breaking the perception of the teacher as the person who has all the answers. Furthermore, by getting these groups to report to the plenary, it helps participants to practice making a convincing argument (ie, “lobbying”) in public, based on the discussions and conclusions of the small group work.

The adaptation and testing process

Although a French version of the training course existed, an enormous amount of work needed to be done translating and adapting the content,

11. The original French version of the training was designed by Dr. B. Thébaud, a leading pastoral expert and rural economist of the Sahel, and implemented within the context of a regional programme entitled Shared Management of Common Property Resources in the Sahel (1998-2001) financed by Comic Relief, Dfid and Norad and implemented by SOS Sahel-GB and IIED. Between 1998-2000 twelve training sessions were carried out in the Sahel for project workers, policy makers, MPs, leaders of pastoral associations, and rural radio broadcasters. Dr. Thébaud also played a leading role in helping ARED adapt the French module into *Pulaar*.

developing an appropriate pedagogic approach, testing the understanding and interest of local communities, etc. (see box 4).

It was fundamental to test everything with community groups directly, and pastoral communities in northern Senegal and eastern Niger participated in this process. Initial testing centred on identifying the best way to introduce the training to herders. Various “entry points” or “key questions” were tested depending on the issues facing the group. In one case, the creation of public water points was the question they were most interested in addressing. In another case, a group had just been told that they needed to reduce the size of their herds and intensify production. In a third case, the participants explored how controlling – or not controlling – water had an impact on natural pastures, and their access to this resource.

Box 4: Testing content and pedagogic approach

- **Content.** It was essential to know if the actual topics being discussed were relevant and interesting to community groups. For example, the merit of including scientific and technical data to back up pastoral livelihood strategies was repeatedly tested. Participants confirmed the value of understanding certain key concepts used by technicians in order that they might develop strong counter arguments to challenge those advanced by government vets or foresters in support of certain policies such as ranching or sedentarisation (e.g. challenges to concepts such as carrying capacity, desertification, over-stocking).
- **Approach.** The principal of “self-discovery” rather than “teaching” required a training approach which allowed participants to feel empowered by their discoveries, rather than condescended to by a teaching style in which the trainer was the “expert”. The approach also needed to be one which relatively inexperienced trainers would be able to use.
- **Order.** Identifying the order in which to introduce information is critical. What background information is needed in order to present a new point? Are some topics more compelling than others, and therefore should become the “entry point” for certain discussions?
- **Timing** was a major concern. How much time would it take to cover materials of this complexity? The original training in French took ten days at six hours per day. The tests in Pulaar confirmed the need to divide the training into two sessions over a total of fifteen to twenty days. Concerns that herders would have a hard time sitting through such a long and intensive process were unfounded.
- **Visuals.** One of the principles of this training is that literate and non-literate participants work together. In order to give the non-literate participants a point of reference for the complex arguments being developed, visuals are used. This can be anything from a simple symbol to a drawing to a series of symbols and drawings put together for meaning. However, “simple” may be a misnomer in that the meaning of even a plus (+) or equal (=) sign has to be explained to non-literate participants.
- **Photos.** The readability of photos needed to be verified at every turn. People hold them upside down, and do not notice. They can have a hard time understanding perspective or context. For example, the tests confirmed that for herders to identify with certainty different grass species, the photos need to show them in their broader ecological setting. Which photos were useful and which were not was learned by trial and error.
- **Translations.** Numerous scientific and legal texts were translated from French to Pulaar. For example, words such as “carrying capacity”, “decentralisation” and “land policy” have no direct Pulaar equivalent. This required developing a good deal of new vocabulary which needed to be tested to see if it corresponded to the letter and spirit of the original text, and if it is easily understood by the participants.

Based on these community tests, the original French training was reworked, and the full course was tested in Mali in 2001 with a group of community radio broadcasters and local NGO personnel as well as with leaders of pastoral associations from Niger, Mali and Senegal. Lessons from this test were incorporated into the French and *Pulaar* versions of the course.

Now it was a question of returning to the community with a *Pulaar* version of the materials. For this, the borehole town of Namarel in northern Senegal was chosen, because of a dynamic pastoral association located there. ARED trainers took the lead, with Brigitte Thébaud guiding them in daily preparations and helping them respond to unexpected questions. The degree to which the participants engaged in this training confirmed the pertinence of its content and the appropriateness of its pedagogic approach.

Once again, both the French and *Pulaar* versions of the training materials were rewritten and then, armed with a reworked version of the text in *Pulaar*, ARED trainers tried for the first time to do this training on their own. They chose to work in the village of Mowul, Senegal with a second pastoral association. The success of this training was highly significant. First, it demonstrated that ARED trainers (who are not pastoral experts but experienced trainers in community-level adult education in *Pulaar*) were able to deliver a highly complex course on the dynamics of pastoralism and its interaction with policy. More importantly, it confirmed that the content and the pedagogic approach of the training was well adapted to community-level resource people, thus opening up the potential to develop a broad programme of community education on the topic in a later phase of work.

The final product

The final product is a trainer's "toolkit" consisting of a package of books and visuals for use in community trainings. Three of the books are actually presented in a loose-leaf folder, rather than as a bound publication (which would exclude any possibility of adaptations and additions in other situations). In all, the full "toolkit" includes:

- A book on the dynamics of the **pastoral system** in the Sahel demonstrating the inter-connection between natural resources, the herd and the family (200 pages).



Visuals are used to enable non-literate participants follow the complex arguments being developed during the training

- A book on the **institutional context** and **policy challenges** facing pastoralists in the Sahel today (184 pages).
- A resource guide on twenty-five crucial **scientific concepts** giving additional information to community trainers who are not necessarily specialists in pastoralism.
- A collection of ninety-one **drawings** crucial to illustrating the training topics.
- A collection of thirty-seven **colour photos** in A3 format to illustrate key issues as they arise.
- A **participant's book** designed as an *aide-mémoire* for each participant, whether the person is literate or not (70 pages).
- A book entitled *A Family Portrait*, which guides interested participants in analysing their individual production systems, including the combination of herding, farming and other income-generating activities (100 pages).



Photo: Brigitte Thébaud

Mixing groups and helping participants to develop arguments to challenge the prejudices held by policy makers on pastoralism are key features of the training

Each book is published in identical French and *Pulaar* versions. Furthermore, the French version is a translation from *Pulaar*, as the training materials were designed initially in *Pulaar* to ensure the pedagogic approach would be well adapted to the needs of community-based trainers.

These materials constitute three units of a complete training module.

The first unit analyses the **dynamics of pastoral systems in the Sahel**. It demonstrates how pastoralism is a “system” made up of three distinct components that interact with each other (the family, their herd of animals, and the resources they depend on), and which is driven by a set of rules and livelihood and risk-spreading strategies. Since the outside perception of pastoralism is often that it is unstructured, random and irrational, the basis of this unit is to help herders discover the dynamics and internal logic underpinning their mode of operation. This is based on helping people analyse and structure what they already know. But they are also presented with scientific data

to reinforce and give legitimacy to their traditional knowledge thereby reinforcing their confidence while “speaking” in the language to the technician better to advocate for pastoralism as a viable livelihood system.

The second unit analyses a number of **policy challenges in the Sahel** and the contribution that pastoralism can make to sustainable and equitable development if supported by an appropriate institutional framework. The unit examines on-going reforms with respect to decentralisation, land tenure and forestry legislation, policies to privatise land or establish public and private water points, regional decisions to regulate transhumance between countries, etc. These contribute to the larger institutional context within which pastoral families must survive. Understanding these processes and the theories on which they are based is critical for pastoralists not only to guide their daily decisions, but to help advocate for change.

The third unit allows a herder to put all this knowledge to use in analysing the livelihood and coping strategies of his or her **individual family**. It focuses on discovering what makes the strategy of an individual family economically and socially viable. While this type of participatory research approach has long been utilized by outside experts, this is the first times that this tool has been developed in an African language, intended for use by the families themselves.

Early impacts and next steps

It is too early to speak of impact on local and national policies. The trainer’s “toolkit” was completed in December 2004. Using the balance of funds from the first phase of MDW, ARED has constituted a stock of the training materials in *Pulaar* and in French. These are already being made available to those partner organisations that participated in the design process, and who are interested in using them to strengthen the capacities of pastoral civil society organisations to engage with local and national decision-making processes in their respective countries. At the time of writing, the training materials are being used in eastern Niger and northern Senegal.¹² In both areas, men and women from pastoral and agro-pastoral communities with either an aptitude in community awareness-raising or prior experience in community-level training are being trained in the use of the pastoral training course. In time, these people will deliver the training to the broader community thereby contributing to a broader and well-informed pastoral civil society movement. Other initiatives are also under way including a process to adapt the training to contexts in Mali and constitute a regional coalition of pastoral civil society organisations in the Sahel.

12. CARE-Denmark are funding the process in eastern Niger, while in Senegal ARED, with support from IED Afrique, are working with three pastoral associations in the Ferlo region, funded by Comic Relief.



New scientific knowledge is introduced only once participants have presented their own knowledge and understanding of an issue – this reinforces and valorises indigenous knowledge systems

Although it is too early to speak of impact on local and national policies, the training has had a marked impact on those individuals that participated in the design and testing process. Ordinary men and women spoke of the sense of liberation from shame and uncertainty which the training gave them. They explained how for years they had endured humiliation by government officials and project workers, who accused them of practicing a primitive and environmentally damaging land use system, saying that they were the agents of their own poverty and were contributing to the desertification of their land. Some participants spoke of how

they believed these accusations, provoking severe loss of confidence in their life style, culture and even personal identity. Participating in the trainings changed their perceptions and gave their lives back to them (as confirmed by the findings of an external evaluation in September 2003).

The evaluation corroborated the relevance and high quality of the training, its accessibility to both literate and non-literate people, its participatory approach building on local knowledge, and its capacity to reach different social categories such as women and the youth. But more importantly, it stressed the impact of the training on building the confidence of participants, on returning their sense of worth as an individual and as a people. Participants interviewed by the evaluation team spoke in terms of: *"Today, I am no longer ashamed to be a pastoralist"; "I have come to terms with myself", and "Finally, I am proud to be my father's son!"* Individuals interviewed by the evaluation team who had not participated in the design process spoke of those who had as *"being different to the rest of us; they are more courageous"*.



5. Building a learning approach to stimulate debate and negotiation

A second tool to build the capacity of civil society to play an effective role in influencing decision-making processes is that of fostering policy dialogue and mutual learning between citizens, government officials and other key stakeholders on issues of common concern. At the level of local government, the manner in which policy objectives are implemented in practice have a profound impact on local people and their livelihoods as well as the development of the area. Designing tools, methods and specific procedures to enable local people to participate effectively in local decision-making is critical. Similarly, elected government officials require cost-effective strategies and approaches to make their actions transparent, visible and accessible so that local people can be kept informed about the decisions that have been taken.

In response to these challenges, and building on IIED's previous experiences in promoting participatory learning and action, the MDW programme adopted a learning group approach at the local level to build the capacities of key actors for improved governance of resources.

Learning group approach

The learning group approach gives different local actors, particularly those belonging to the most vulnerable groups, the opportunity to influence decisions at the local level. There are certain pre-requisites that a learning group involved in evaluating decentralisation needs to fulfil to make it pertinent, inclusive and sustainable.

- All members of the group should have an interest in the problem being addressed by the learning process. This may be because they are directly involved in implementing an activity that could be improved by participation in a mutual learning process; or because they are directly affected by such actions and could therefore make them more effective by participating in a process of joint reflection.
- Actors that have agreed to participate in the group should be prepared for their perceptions and practices to be challenged. It is not a matter of focusing on any particular actor, but of sharing practices and experiences in order to enrich the mutual learning process. Thus, to make a useful contribution, participants should be able to bring a practice or experience to the learning group.

- The expectations, roles and responsibilities of the different members of the learning group should be clearly defined, to draw out complementary elements that the process can build on and anticipate potential misunderstandings.
- It is important that the rights of each actor are recognised by all concerned. In the context of social inclusion, it is vital that participation and the right to oversight are not seen as means of usurping the legally mandated powers of elected officials. The synergy between legality and legitimacy should be maintained while respecting everyone's prerogatives.
- Actors require certain aptitudes to be able to participate in the learning process. From the outset, therefore, emphasis is placed on bringing members of the learning group up to the same level of understanding on various themes, ranging from the content of decentralisation to the roles and responsibilities of elected officials and citizens in the decentralisation process.
- The methodological approach developed should take account of the different capacities of the diverse actors involved. In this respect, emphasis is put in using visual tools so that illiterate members of the learning group can not only participate in discussions, but also use the materials to build on what they had learned.

Within the context of the MDW programme, the learning group approach has been applied in three areas:

- participatory budgeting in Senegal;
- participatory monitoring and evaluation in Senegal and Mali; and,
- gender and decentralisation in Senegal and Burkina Faso.

IED Afrique, formerly the IIED-Sahel programme, coordinated this work.¹³

Participatory budgeting in Senegal

Participatory budgeting was introduced in the two *communautés rurales* (rural councils) of Fissel and Ndiaganiao in the Thies region, Senegal. This initiative has two objectives: first, to help the council draw up and implement their budgets in a participatory way with the community and second, to establish a monitoring system to allow local people to track how local government officials subsequently take decisions with respect to the council's finances.

13. On September 1st 2005, the IIED Sahel programme set up in 1993 by the IIED Drylands Programme was transformed into a new independent organisation with a new name: *Innovations, Environnement et Développement en Afrique (IED Afrique)*.

Allowing local people to have a say in how in how their taxes are spent and monitor actual expenditure, is essential if people are to agree to pay their taxes in the first place, and thereby contribute to the financing of local development.

Unlike conventional budget planning, where the councillors take all decisions, participatory budgeting makes citizens the key decisions makers. In each rural council, an upward, participatory budget planning process, starting from the village up to the rural council level, was established (see box 5).

Particular attention is given to the participation of vulnerable groups, particularly women and youth. This has involved ensuring first that their delegates are present throughout the whole budget setting process, including the monitoring committee. Second, that particular consideration is given to their priorities in the final budget.

By December 2004, the programme had established learning groups in the two rural councils to oversee the implementation of the participatory budget planning process. They were composed of representatives of the rural council, local civil society in particular representatives of women and youth organisations, men's organisations, the local radio, and occasionally members of the administration (*sous-préfecture*).

In support of these groups, IED Afrique facilitated eight themed training workshops on decentralisation as part of capacity building initiatives for local actors (step 1). These covered the role of councillors, the roles and responsibilities of the technical commissions, and budget formulation. A range of other activities accompanied this process. These included the design of materials for information and training, the setting up a local newspaper in Fissel, the organisation of more than ten radio broadcasts to help disseminate information and training, and the organisation of exchange visits in the community to help raise awareness on the importance and potential impact of participatory budgeting.

Box 5: Participatory budget planning process

Step 1: preparation. This involved informing the different stakeholders on the issues at stake and defining the approaches and methods to be used.

Step 2: analysing needs. Village forums took place to allow each village in the rural council to analyse their constraints and set priorities and actions.

Step 3: setting priorities. Meetings took place between delegates from the different villages to synthesise the key constraints, priorities and actions arising from the village forums.

Step 4: setting local development objectives. Meetings took place between the village delegates and local councillors to discuss the proposed set of priority actions to be included in the rural council's budget document.

Step 5: budget drafting. The rural councillors prepare a draft budget based on the proposed set of priority actions presented by the village delegates.

Step 6: budget voting and approval. Meetings to present and approve the budget. The "sous-prefet" legally approves the budget.

Step 7: budget monitoring. A monitoring committee is established from the village delegates. It has been agreed that a quarterly review process bringing together councillors and the monitoring committee members would be organized based on monitoring indicators and tools yet to be developed in 2005.

Outcomes and next steps

The process is on-going. In December 2005, IED Afrique supported the two rural councils in adopting the same approach for their new budget. During 2005, emphasis will be put on making the budget monitoring committee more operational (step 7) as this step was not implemented by the end of 2004. The rural councils of Fissel and Ndiagianiao recognise the critical importance of participatory budgeting to securing a sustainable stream of revenue from local taxes to fund local development initiatives identified by local people. Local people too have a heightened awareness of their rights, responsibilities and capacity to hold elected leaders accountable. For example, the monitoring committee in Ndiagianiao has taken the initiative of organising "information tours", to explain the importance of this new approach and call for a stronger participation from the communities.

Other rural councils in Senegal, hearing of the experiences in Fissel and Ndiagianiao, have requested IED Afrique's support in helping them to establish similar processes. In this regard, the presidents of thirty rural councils from different regions in Senegal have visited Fissel to learn more about their experiences and discuss about how they might adopt it in their areas. This work has also been linked to a wider initiative on social accountability sponsored by the World Bank and IED Afrique has been involved in a larger network supported by them to facilitate the dissemination of social accountability approaches and methods in francophone West Africa.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation of decentralisation

Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) is the second thematic issue introduced by the MDW programme in two councils in Mali (*Commune VI* in Bamako and the rural council of Bancoumana) and one rural council in Senegal (Fissel). PM&E is a tool to allow local people to judge whether their local government authorities are delivering tangible benefits at reasonable costs and for whom. It also allows them to monitor how in practice rural councils are managing the land and natural resources under their control (e.g. forest lands, water, rangelands), and whether the benefits harvested from these resources are being equitably shared among local residents.

The 1st phase of the programme concentrated on testing and finalising a methodological procedure for participatory monitoring and evaluation of decentralisation. IED Afrique conducted this work in the rural council of Fissel in Senegal, and, in collaboration with members of the MDW network in Mali, in the rural and urban councils of Bancoumana and *Commune VI* of Bamako. A learning group was set up in each council, composed of elected

local officials, community extension agents responsible for helping establish the system and representatives of different community groups.

The work of the learning groups centred on: selecting a team of PM&E local facilitators; trainings local facilitators, elected councillors and civil society members on PM&E, decentralisation and local governance; organisation of local forums to evaluate the implementation of decentralisation and identification of monitoring criteria; initiation of actions to improve the decentralisation process. As illustrated by Fissel, PM&E is not an end in itself. While it was the entry point of learning group work, the process has rapidly evolved and resulted in the introduction of major changes on issues such as transparency and accountability (participatory budgeting), good governance of natural resources (the dissemination of local conventions), or strengthening citizens' awareness regarding their rights and responsibilities (local newspaper in Fissel). These different thematic foci provide a good illustration on how to move from observation and monitoring to action. It is anticipated that during phase II of MDW, emphasis will be put on consolidating these processes in the two rural councils while extending the experience to other areas in Senegal and Mali.

Gender and decentralisation

Decentralisation has, in principle, opened up new opportunities for women to participate in public life and thereby to improve their access to resources, including land as well as basic services in health and education. In practice, however, women's participation in the decentralisation process is very disappointing, both numerically and in terms of their levels of responsibility. In Senegal and Mali, women account for less than 10% of elected Mayors and councillors and even when they are elected, they are rarely given positions of power within the council.

Reinforcing the capacity of women to participate more effectively in public life at the level of rural councils is a complex and long-term process that has to be driven from within society by both men and women. Building this internal capacity for empowerment with a particular focus on improving women's access to land and natural resources is the focus of two complementary activities implemented during the first phase of the MDW programme in Burkina Faso and Senegal.

The first involved setting up a learning group in two rural councils in Senegal (Fissel and Fandene) to identify the social, cultural and political factors that prevent women from fully participating in the decentralisation process. This work has contributed to the design of a training module on a methodology

Box 6: Portrait of Coumba Ibra Dieng

Coumba Ibra Dieng lives in the village Waalaldé in the Senegal river valley in northern Senegal. She is 48 years old and lives in a polygamous household with her 3 other co-wives. There are 21 people in the household altogether. As the eldest daughter, she often had to take initiatives and assume responsibilities when she was



young. She went to school, but like most girls in rural areas did not go beyond primary school. She was married at the age of 15 to the village teacher who played an influential role in getting her parents to send her to school. He also encouraged her to engage in the different women associations in the village. But according to Coumba, her contact with a local project (*Projet Intégré de Podor*) in 1985 was the major trigger, which pushed her to the frontline.

The Director of that local NGO, who detected the leadership potential that was "dormant" in Coumba, provided her with advice and training to develop her skills. Since then, she has been engaged in different initiatives. She set up a women's producer group in the village, was elected as a rural councillor, and became the first woman to head the land commission. Coumba successfully persuaded the rural council to allocate very productive land to the women's group and has played a key role in attracting other investments in the village (grinding mill, water pump, telephone, etc.). She has become a key figure in the region not only for women, but also for men who consult her on a variety of matters. She believes that gaining self-confidence constitutes the major challenge for women to become change agents. But for this to happen, it is important to be in the right context and get the timely needed advice and support from the family and from the outside, as she has.

for evaluating the participation of women in local government decision-making fora, aimed at female rural extension agents. Since this training happened, women facilitators who were trained have organised local fora bringing together rural councillors, traditional leaders and members of the grassroots organisations to reflect on the issue of women participation. Because of this process, the rural council of Fissel has allowed non-elected representatives of women's organisations to take part in the council meetings and contribute ideas and suggestions. This process will be strengthened during phase II, in order to bring long-term solutions to the chronic numeric and strategic under-representation of women in the rural councils and other decision-making spheres. This requires, for example, challenging the process used by rural councils to select candidates for election.

The second activity involved drawing up portraits of successful

female leaders in Senegal and Burkina Faso, in order to understand the key factors and processes that enable women to become leaders within their society, and identify ways in which this could be applied within the context of decentralisation. Four portraits have been developed and finalised for broader dissemination. A video has also been made portraying the career path of one of these women leaders. It is being used as a tool to stimulate debate and discussion among women groups on the key factors that project women into positions of power and leadership (see box 6).

6. Policy-oriented action research to support informed debate

Generating and disseminating knowledge is another pillar of Making Decentralisation Work. Policies do matter. Bad policies may frustrate the everyday efforts of households and communities, while good policies can make a difference by supporting their livelihood strategies. Getting good policies requires, among other things, a good understanding of the key issues and challenges on the ground, and learning lessons from experience – what works where, what doesn't and why. Therefore, there is a need to generate knowledge on issues that are little understood by practitioners and policy makers; to document best practice; and to feed these findings into policy processes.

To address this need, Making Decentralisation Work has carried out studies on a range of key issues of direct relevance to people's lives and has supported events where different stakeholders could discuss policy issues, drawing on findings from the studies. In so doing, it has focused on key challenges for the design and implementation of decentralisation policies in the natural resource management sector. These have included:

how best to implement the transfer of authority for land and resource management to local communities; what tools can be used for decentralised and inclusive natural resource management (e.g. "local conventions"); and how best to take into account the needs of non-resident groups (e.g. pastoralists) within the context of decentralisation. In addition, MDW has triggered complementary bodies of work on broader challenges facing the Sahel – such as the debate on the role of family farming and large-scale commercial agriculture, which is taking place in all the countries covered by Making Decentralisation Work.



Watering camels at a modern well (Niger, 2005)

Photo: Brigitte Thébaud

Land tenure and resource access in West Africa

Across the Sahel, decentralisation processes are strictly linked to land tenure reform – with local governments being transferred responsibility for land and natural resource management (e.g. in Senegal and in Mali). Getting land rights right is key for decentralisation to succeed in practice. This is because land provides the main livelihood source for most of the rural population, and because it constitutes an important source of political power. In many peri-urban communes of Mali, for instance, local governments have been busy selling lands for residential purposes. Good local governance of land relations emerges as one of the key challenges of decentralisation in the four countries. In order to contribute to meeting this challenge, Making Decentralisation Work has supported the generation and dissemination of knowledge on these issues. In so doing, it has created synergies with other IIED programmes in West Africa – particularly our body of work on land tenure and the Future of Family Farming programme.

As for generating knowledge, a number of studies have for instance explored how “new actors” – often urban elites such as civil servants, politicians and businessmen – are entering the land arena, with the support of central and local governments. Seen by some as the heralds of private investment and agricultural “modernisation”, these new actors have used their access to information, contacts and resources to appropriate common lands, with negative consequences for local farmers. A range of studies have explored these dynamics in Mali and Burkina Faso. Two of these have been published as part of the IIED Issue Papers series (see box 7 for details). Similarly, a field study shed light on what is happening with land registration processes in a peri-urban area of Mali.



Farmer showing cassava roots grown in his multicrop fields

Parallel to these efforts to generate new knowledge, Making Decentralisation Work has also supported the dissemination of relevant research findings from other related programs. In particular, it funded the publication in English and in French of the proceedings of an international workshop on "Making land rights more secure". The workshop took place in Ouagadougou in March 2002 and brought together researchers, practitioners and policy makers. It marked the end of a large research programme on land rights in West Africa, and was funded by the French, Danish and Swedish Ministries of Foreign Affairs, with additional contributions from other donors (e.g. DFID). Key MDW partners (e.g. GRAF) contributed to the organisation of the workshop, and participated in it. Making Decentralisation Work also supported the publication of two studies on the emerging trends and governance challenges linked to land tenure in Africa (see box 7 for greater details).

Box 7: Key studies and publications on land tenure and resource access

- Moussa Ouédraogo, 2003, "New stakeholders and the promotion of agro-silvo-pastoral activities in southern Burkina Faso: false start or inexperience?", London, IIED, Issue Paper 118 (also available in French);
- Moussa Djiré, 2004, "The myths and realities of local governance in Sanankoroba, Mali", London, IIED, Issue Paper 130 (also available in French);
- Moussa Djiré, 2004, "Land registration and decentralisation in Kati, Mali" Unpublished document
- Amadou Keita, 2004, "Changing dynamics in land relations in the Commune of Bancoumana, Mali". Unpublished document
- IIED/GRAF/GRET, 2004, "Making land rights more secure", proceedings of the international workshop for researchers and policy makers held in Ouagadougou in March 2002, London, IIED, Land Tenure and Resource Access series.
- Liz Alden Wily, 2004, "Governance and land relations: a review of decentralisation of land administration and management in Africa", London, IIED, Land Tenure and Resource Access series.
- Lorenzo Cotula, Camilla Toulmin & Ced Hesse, 2004, "Land tenure and administration in Africa: lessons of experience and emerging issues", London, IIED, Land Tenure and Resource Access series.



Finally, Making Decentralisation Work supported innovative ways of generating and disseminating knowledge. For instance, it supported the filming and dissemination of a video on land and resource conflict in Burkina Faso.

Local conventions

Local conventions are sets of rules developed, implemented and monitored by local people, which define access to and use of land, forests and other natural resources. They are practical tools for resource conflict management, for local participation in decision-making, and for the effective transfer of responsibilities for NRM from central government to local government bod-

ies. However, while these arrangements offer great potential, particularly within the context of decentralisation, they also raise many issues, principally with respect to their legality and equitable treatment of certain categories of users (e.g. non-resident groups).

Making Decentralisation Work focused on documenting best practice with local conventions, to enable exchange of experience among practitioners and to promote informed policy debate at both national and regional levels. Key activities included:

- The documentation and publication of several cases of successful local conventions in formats targeting practitioners and policy makers (e.g. through a publication series specifically devoted to local conventions; two videos; several IIED Drylands Issue Papers).
- The organisation of a regional conference on local conventions in Bamako in December 2003, bringing together some 60 practitioners, researchers and policy makers from Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.
- As a follow up to the conference, the establishment of national working groups to pursue further debate and analysis on how local conventions can be used as a tool for implementing decentralisation in NRM. In Senegal, for instance, this took the form of a network including civil society, government officials and parliamentarians (see sections 7 and 8 below).

Pastoral legislation

Several Sahelian countries have recently adopted “pastoral” legislation to help reconcile competing resource uses – particularly pastoralism and agriculture – and are now in the process of drafting the necessary implementing regulations (Mali, Burkina Faso). In Niger, a new pastoral code is currently being designed through a consultative process involving civil society, local government, customary authorities, development practitioners and other key actors. These processes are closely linked to decentralisation, as pastoral legislation may give local governments important resource management responsibilities (e.g. Mali). Also, ensuring participation in local



Photo: Brigitte Thebaud

Young girl leading a camel to extract water (Niger, 2005)

government by mobile (and often marginalised) groups such as pastoralists is one of the key challenges facing decentralisation in the Sahel today. In Guinea, a Pastoral Code has been in place for 10 years – enough to assess the extent to which it has made a difference on the ground, and to feed key findings in law-making processes in other Sahelian countries. For this purpose, Making Decentralisation Work supported a field study on the implementation and impact of Guinea’s Pastoral Code 1995. A team of Sahelian researchers undertook the study. The study shed light on the history and content of the Code (and on the problems concerning its relationship with other natural resource legislation), and on the challenges affecting implementation – particularly on how the norms of the Code are being reinterpreted and manipulated by actors on ground in a way that best suits their needs. The findings were presented at regional events (see below) and published as an IIED Drylands Issue Paper.

Box 8: Key materials on local conventions, pastoral legislation and “observing decentralisation”

- Mamadou Bara Guèye & Serigne Mansour Tall, 2003, *Les Conventions Locales au Sahel: Un outil de co-gouvernance en gestion des ressources naturelles*, IIED, Dakar, Local Conventions series No. 1 (also available in English).
- Moussa Djiré, 2004, *Les conventions locales au Mali: une grande nébuleuse juridique et un pragmatisme en GRN*, IIED, Dakar, Local Conventions series No. 2.
- Oussouby Touré, 2004, *The impact of pastoral legislation on equitable and sustainable natural resource management in Guinea*, IIED, London, Issue Paper 126 (also available in French).
- Amadi Coulibaly & Thea Hilhorst, 2004, *Implementing decentralisation in Mali: the experience of two rural councils in Southern Mali*, IIED, London, Issue Paper 127 (also available in French).



“Observing decentralisation”

Making Decentralisation Work has supported activities to monitor the implementation of decentralisation in the Sahel. For instance, a study by Amadi Coulibaly and Thea Hilhorst documented the implementation of decentralisation in two rural councils in the south of Mali, identifying key successes and challenges. The study promoted an informed debate on these issues in the two councils, and was published as an IIED Issue Paper (see box 8).

The future of family farming

An offshoot of Making Decentralisation Work, the Future of Family Farming programme generated knowledge and promoted debate on strategic choices of economic policy – particularly on the role of family farming and large-scale commercial agriculture in the “modernisation” of agriculture in West Africa. In official discourses, family farming is often presented as backward,



Harvesting tomatoes irrigated in the Niayes region, Senegal

inefficient and subsistence oriented, with farmers unable to access credit to invest and increase productivity. Commercial agriculture, on the other hand, is seen as modern and forward-looking, efficient and market oriented.

Our work, building on the work of others (Mortimore 2003), has challenged these assumptions, showing how family farming constitutes the backbone of Sahelian agriculture, and is highly dynamic and responsive to change and to market incentives. Research covered issues as diverse as the nature and challenges of family farming, the growing role of commercial agriculture and its impact on family farmers (a body of work closely linked to the work on “new actors”, mentioned above). We also looked at the impact of dumping and agricultural subsidies on West African producers, and the role of international remittances in supporting family farms in West Africa.

In addition to research (see box 9 for a list of key publications), the programme has worked closely with farmers’ associations at national and regional levels, particularly ROPPA and policy-oriented institutions such as the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) of the OECD. It has promoted an informed and more balanced debate on these issues through national consultations held in Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal with key stakeholders and the production of a video, *Keep it in the family*. The video, produced in collaboration with Television Trust for the Environment (TVE), profiles a number of

Box 9: Key publications on the future of family farming

- Camilla Toulmin & Bara Guèye, 2003, *Transformations in West African agriculture and the role of family farms*, IIED, London, Issue Paper 123 (also available in French).
- Lorenzo Cotula & Camilla Toulmin (eds), 2004, *Till to tiller: international migration, remittances and land rights in West Africa*, IIED, London, Issue Paper 132 (also available in French).
- Oussouby Toure & Sidy Mohamed Seck, 2005, *Family and commercial farming in the Niayes area of Senegal*, IIED, London, Issue Paper 133 (also available in French).
- Su Fei Tan & Bara Guèye (eds), 2005, *Portraits of family farming in West Africa*, IIED, London, Issue Paper 134 (also available in French).



successful small-farmers in Senegal and how, in spite of an unfavourable national policy environment, they succeed not only in meeting their family's food requirements, but are also able to produce for the market. With the right policies in place, they could play a central role as the key drivers of economic growth in the region. BBC World broadcast the video in its prestigious Earth Report series five times in the week leading up to the G8 meeting in Gleneagles in Scotland in June 2005 reaching an estimated 230 million homes and hotels in 220 countries. BBC News 24 also broadcast it twice as a backdrop to coverage on the G8 meeting. A longer version of the video will be used as a policy dialogue tool in Senegal and the Sahel more broadly to stimulate debate and call for agricultural policies supportive to family farming in the latter half of 2005.



Regional events

Building on knowledge generated through field studies, Making Decentralisation Work has brokered national and regional events to discuss key policy issues. Examples of regional events organised within the Making Decentralisation Work programme include a regional conference on local conventions (see above), and the workshop "Equitable Access to Natural Resources", held within the context of the "Praia+9" regional forum on land tenure and sustainable development in West Africa (Bamako, November 2003). The latter forum, spearheaded by the CILSS, brought together high-level policy makers, opinion leaders and researchers from 16 West African countries, and produced a set of policy recommendations that were endorsed by the Heads of State and Government of CILSS member states. Besides organising one of the five thematic workshops around which the forum was structured, Making Decentralisation Work supported the attendance of civil society organisations that brought to the forum views and needs from the grassroots – such as representatives from pastoral associations and development workers involved in MDW activities.

International workshops

In May 2004, IIED and Uppsala University convened an international workshop on "Decentralisation in practice: Power, livelihoods and cultural meaning in West Africa". The workshop took place in Uppsala (Sweden), and

brought together over 50 people from West Africa and Europe. It enabled us to “take stock” of the knowledge generated by MDW and other programmes; and to establish and consolidate partnerships with Swedish and other European institutions working on these issues. A workshop report and a CD-ROM containing all papers presented at the workshop were subsequently published (Uppsala Universitet & IIED, 2004, “Decentralisation in practice: Power, livelihoods and cultural meaning in West Africa – Workshop highlights”). As a side event to the workshop, a team of IIED researchers held a lunch seminar for Sida staff in Stockholm, presenting key activities and outputs of the MDW programme.



Linkages with the other “pillars” of MDW

The policy research component of Making Decentralisation Work operated in synergy with the other components. On the one hand, the generation and dissemination of knowledge supported other MDW activities. For instance, the research findings generated by MDW informed networking activities in the four countries. Local conventions – a key topic for the policy research pillar – constituted one of the main areas of activity for the networks in Mali and Burkina Faso. National networks contributed to the generation of knowledge on this issue and to the organisation of the 2003 regional workshop, and in turn reoriented their activities and priorities in light of research findings and regional activities. Similarly, pastoral legislation has been a key priority for the national network in Niger, which is actively involved in the process to elaborate a pastoral code in Niger.

On the other hand, knowledge generation and dissemination alone are unlikely to result in better policy. Policy-making is a highly political process, and policy outcomes are likely to be affected by power relations within society. This is why, within the Making Decentralisation Work programme, the policy research component was integrated in a broader set of activities aimed at addressing power imbalances – such as training in local language, which aims to give poorer groups more voice in decision making.

7. Networking to build consensus and alliances

Building coalitions among different actors with a shared understanding of key policy challenges and how best to respond, is another prerequisite to making decentralisation work, particularly for marginal groups. Networking is one way of achieving this condition, enabling civil society more generally to voice its concerns and participate in policy debate and have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. Consequently, the Making Decentralisation Work programme facilitated the establishment of networks in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

Given the specific contexts of each country, no pre-determined model for networking was imposed. A regional conference in Burkina Faso (November 2000) on policy analysis and advocacy launched the process. Participants from Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal, and Mauritania spent five days sharing lessons on how best to engage with the design and implementation of policy defining the management of land and other natural resources within a context of decentralisation. A key issue to emerge was the absence of any mechanism to support a process of informed debate among civil society at both national and local levels on the challenges and stakes of decentralisation, specifically as they relate to natural resource management. The conference participants took it upon themselves to establish such a mechanism in their respective countries.

National networks were established in 2001 in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger following a series of national consultation workshops.¹⁴ At these meetings, facilitated by IIED, participants in each country identified the objectives of their respective networks, the priority themes they would work on and how activities would be organised and decisions taken. Each network had its own style of networking, reflecting the status of the decentralisation process in the country, the key issues at stake and the opportunities for contributing to policy debate. After three years of activity, the evaluation confirmed their pertinence and added value, qualifying them as the beginnings of an informed civil society movement with the potential to inform and influence national policy-making processes. Although the networks have performed differently, they have to varying levels succeeded in bringing together a diverse and representative body of actors from different levels and institu-

14. In Senegal, a different approach was taken building on IED Afrique's work on institutionalising participation. Networking activities focused on strengthening a process of local and regional level networking through the learning group approach.

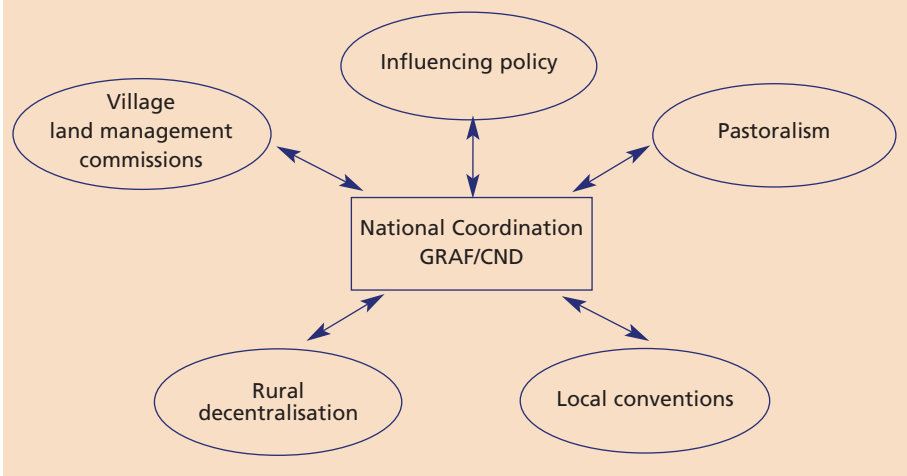
tions. And through their activities (thematic action-research, learning groups, newsletters, regular meetings), they have nourished a process of informed debate on various topics of immediate relevance to decentralisation or decentralised natural resource management.¹⁵

Burkina Faso: focusing on issues

The network in Burkina Faso adopted a structure based on a central coordination and five thematic learning groups: rural decentralisation, pastoralism, village land management commissions,¹⁶ influencing policy and local conventions for natural resource management.

In 2001, two national coordinators were appointed during the first national network meeting, one from GRAF and the other from the *Commission Nationale de Décentralisation* (CND) with GRAF taking responsibility for administrative matters. A member of GRAF was appointed in October 2001 to take charge of the implementation of the network activities, i.e. coordinating national workshops and learning groups. She also looked after communications and reporting. In addition, GRAF's administrator provided part-time support to the organisation of network activities. A steering committee was also established composed of the coordinators of the learning groups together with the national coordinators.

Diagram of MDW Burkina Faso network



15. The evaluation highlighted a number of key areas requiring attention to further strengthen the capacities of the networks to facilitate a more inclusive and effective process of debate, particularly at the local levels.

16. Commissions villageoises de gestion du terroir.

Rural Decentralisation. The objective of this group was to learn lessons from the experience of urban communes for rural decentralisation and assess progress with the preparations for rural decentralisation. The group analysed the following themes: information systems in place on rural decentralisation and their accessibility and clarity; poverty alleviation through rural decentralisation in particular for more marginal groups; viability of councils from a financial perspective and the relationship between them and villages outside their boundaries, and finally technical support for rural councils. A particularly interesting study on the level of information people have on decentralisation showed there to be a generally low level of knowledge about the process. The group prepared briefing papers for the CND on the future of rural decentralisation in Burkina Faso and organised lobbying activities.

Village land management commissions (CVGT). The CVGT are village-based committees responsible for land tenure and natural resource management. The government is establishing these committees all over Burkina Faso. This learning group was the most active of the five. It was made up of about a dozen members, about a third of whom were very involved in the work of the group. A study was commissioned to assess the effectiveness of CVGTs and reflect on the articulation between them, the future rural council offices and other existing local power structures and development organisations. The study found that the CVGTs studied were functional and had succeeded in developing village level development plans.

In the first half of 2003, both the option 'departmental' and the option 'agglomeration'¹⁷ were discussed as ways forward for rural decentralisation. This working group therefore decided to prepare a policy brief which compared the two options with respect to the management of collective infrastructure, natural resource management, land tenure, local development planning, investment and the mobilising local resources. When the new law was passed in August 2003, however, these activities came to a halt before the policy brief was finalised.

At the end of 2004, after much lobbying and prevarication by government, it was decided that the departmental approach should be adopted and a new law has been passed to reflect this decision. This means that rural councils will be based along departmental lines creating approximately 350 local government authorities. It is expected that elections will take place in April 2006.

17. An agglomeration is an area with at least 5,000 inhabitants able to raise a budget of at least 5,000,000 FCFA. Adopting this option would have meant that many villages outside councils of this size would have had difficulty in participating in decentralisation processes as they would have been far away from the seat of their local council. People living outside an agglomeration would have been represented at the regional rather than provincial level.



Photo: Bara Guèye

Discussion around the Ngiagagniao rural community map

Local conventions. Local conventions are local agreements for natural resource management. They consist of regulations developed and monitored by local people, which define access to and use of land, forest, water and other resources. Local conventions have usually been introduced by NGOs and other community based projects, and are currently not recognised by government as a legal instrument. Consequently, they may not provide enough security for local people to invest sufficient time and money in improving the resources in question. A major question is whether future local government structures (e.g. rural councils) will recognise local conventions and use them to manage natural resources within the Commune's territory. Decentralisation also raises questions about how best to bridge formal and informal systems of regulation and authority.

Pastoralism and decentralisation. The point of departure for this group is that pastoralism is an important economic activity, which can contribute a significant level of income, both directly and indirectly, to the future rural councils. Maintaining the mobility of livestock herds is an essential aspect of pastoralism and thus secure access to grazing lands and water is essential for maintaining the system and preventing conflict. Typically, grazing lands stretch over more than one rural council, and thus require joint management by several communes.

The group undertook a study on the financial contribution pastoralism can make to the budgets of rural councils based on the experience of CEFRAP in the Fada N’Gourma region. The study demonstrated the strong potential of the livestock sector with regard to contributions to the budgets of local communes.

The group also looked at inter-village grazing lands and the threats that these face from agriculture and the representation of pastoralists in the resolution of conflicts between farmers and herders.

Influencing policies. This group looked at ways of building understanding on how to influence government policies effectively. It was perhaps the weakest of the five as it experienced great difficulty in launching activities and on agreeing a structure and way of working.

Other activities

The network secretariat organised a series of highly successful *soirées-débats* in 2001 and 2002 on the following themes:

- Regionalisation
- Rural communalisation
- CVGTs
- Rural decentralisation

These evenings were very well attended reflecting the low level of information on decentralisation processes in Burkina Faso and the desire of stakeholders to learn more.

The national coordination also worked with IIED Sahel to develop a portrait of a successful woman leader as part of the work on gender and decentralisation in the MDW programme (see above).

Challenges

A general difficulty with the structure of the network in Burkina Faso is that activities and debate occur mainly in the capital, Ouagadougou. During the second phase, the network will think strategically on how to broaden its activities to include other cities and rural areas. Secondly, there is an acknowledgement on behalf of the coordination that issues of gender were not sufficiently addressed. Originally, it was decided not to establish a learning group on gender and decentralisation as this theme cuts across the work of the different learning groups and it was thought that each would address the issue in their work plans. In practice this did not happen.

Mali: exploring different themes

In Mali, the MDW network was established during a workshop in Fana held in April 2001. Its structure is similar to that in Burkina Faso in that there is a central coordination point and activities are in the main focused around six thematic areas.

Coordination, workshops and meetings

A national coordinator manages the work of the network (six days a month), with support from a full time assistant. Together they organise meetings, assure the circulation of information, write reports, prepare articles for *Seg Taaba*, and organise the publication of documents produced by the network, notably the newsletter *La Toile*.

National meetings are held every six months (January and July). The network coordinators and some of the learning group members attend together with interested civil servants and other observers. Generally, between thirty and forty people attend these meetings. It is at these workshops that network members and external people share learning from experience and across thematic groups.

Once every four months the thematic group focal points meet with the national coordinators. They agree terms of reference submitted by thematic groups for specific pieces of work, make decisions on which activities will receive financial support and how much they will receive, and monitor the progress of current studies and research action.

The membership is very diverse. It is free and on a voluntary basis. There are about one hundred members from institutions and on an individual basis. Members come from state technical services, civil society organisations, local government bodies, research organisations, and the legal profession. They come from seven of the nine regions in Mali.

Thematic Groups

Six thematic groups were established and these meet on a periodic basis.

1. *Council natural resource management planning.*¹⁸ This learning group looks at the extent to which environmental issues have been included in the development plans of the rural councils and how they may be adequately addressed. They began activities by carrying out a survey of rural council plans in three districts. This group also produced a report on municipal level natural resource management in 2001, which was widely disseminated within the network. In addition, they undertook action research on how to improve the management of riverbanks when there are several councils involved. Six rural councils in the region of Koulikoro were brought together to analyse the problem and identify possible solutions.

2. *Delegation of authority and resources.*¹⁹ The delegation of authority and resources to local government determines what rural councils can really achieve for their citizens. It is therefore vital that (i) the transfer is carried out and (ii) that the capacity of councils to take on these responsibilities is adequate.

At the end of 2002, the network was invited to participate in a multiple stakeholder event, including relevant government ministries, to discuss how best to devolve discretionary decision-making powers for natural resource management. It seems that the trend within the Ministry is towards favouring a more top-down approach with respect to natural resource management, with more emphasis on control and sanctions, as well as a preference for institutional working relationships over collaboration with more 'informal networks'. The network is planning to organise the "farmers" workshop in the coming months whether or not the Ministry decides to participate, whilst continuing to engage with the Ministry in a positive manner.

3. *Local agreements and conflict management.*²⁰ This learning group is based in Sikasso in southern Mali and carried out activities to initiate new local conventions on fisheries and to establish agreements between two or more councils, evaluating the results of already existing regulations and reflecting on methodology.

The group presented its results at the programme-wide annual meeting of January 2003. A follow up plan of work was developed and approved by the network. The focus changed to how best to validate local conventions, which

18. Planification communale de la gestion des ressources naturelles.

19. Transfert de compétences.

20. Conventions locales et prévention/gestion des conflits.

resulted in the development of a procedure and possible monitoring system. This group also played a key role in the organisation of the international workshop on local conventions, which took place in December 2003.

4. *Inter-council cooperation.*²¹ The issues of how best to promote collaboration between rural councils, particularly over land and resource management, has received a lot of attention and creating an appropriate framework is an important part of a functioning decentralised local government system. This has become a priority for government. One reason it is important is that it facilitates collaboration for managing the infrastructure or natural resources shared by two or more councils (e.g. forests). Mutual cooperation can also stimulate small, less viable local government bodies to come together and seek synergy and economies of scale in the management of their affairs.

This group started work in 2002. It carried out an inventory of infrastructures and natural resources shared between councils, how councils are managing these situations and the requirements of a legal and administrative framework to facilitate the development of inter-council agreements. An inventory was made of the key issues and challenges with respect to the shared management of resources between councils in rural areas.

A bill on municipal cooperation was drawn up by the government earlier than expected, which made it difficult for the learning group to feed the results of its research into the legal process. The bill, however, was widely criticised by many organisations working on these issues who feared that it would not, in fact, facilitate municipal cooperation and may even create more problems in the future. Various organisations came together to draft a common reply, an activity in which the network was involved.

5. *Land tenure.* In May 2003, a workshop was held to report on the results of a study on land tenure undertaken by sixteen rural councils in the Mandé area. This was organised by the network coordinators with some input by this working group, as the group itself was not very active. Several members of the network also participated in a meeting in Timbuktu in April 2003 to discuss the draft regulations the government is proposing to develop for the implementation of the Pastoral Charter decrees.

6. *Gender.* This working group was not as active as the others, but it did organise a one-day meeting on gender in the context of natural resource management.

21. Intercommunalité.

At the 5th national workshop, the decision was taken to start a learning group on the topic of lobbying and influencing policy within the network. In September 2003, a consultant was contracted to undertake a study on this theme for discussion in the network.

Other activities

Other activities of the network are the publication of six issues of the newsletter *La Toile* and six monthly reports for all members of the network. Members of the network also participated in a range of other meetings (organised by DED, Centre Djoliba, OMAES) and regularly receive visitors such as from PACAD-Timbuktu. Finally, a study on observing decentralisation was carried out (see box 10).

Challenges

In general, the network faced a problem of lack of visibility and identity. This is partially due to the informal nature of the network. While this informality and flexibility is desirable, it may detract from the network's recognition and ability to influence policy.

There is also a question of how to promote network activities elsewhere in the country. There is good geographical and professional diversity in the membership but network activities could be strengthened if work was carried out at the regional level. A mechanism for informing and learning from debates taking place in different communes with the work of the thematic groups would also strengthen network activities.

Niger: "bottom-up" decentralised networking

Networking in Niger has not been easy. Initial conceptual difficulties around what constitutes "networking" in a country with a long tradition of centralised decision-making, were exacerbated by the poor communication infrastructure. In the first year, "networking" was limited to a few meetings of the ad hoc committee set up at the initial consultation workshop in 2001 to reflect on the future organisation of the network. Network members, particularly those based in the regions, were understandably frustrated and at the 2nd annual meeting, the network adopted a new approach. It was decid-

Box 10: Observing decentralisation

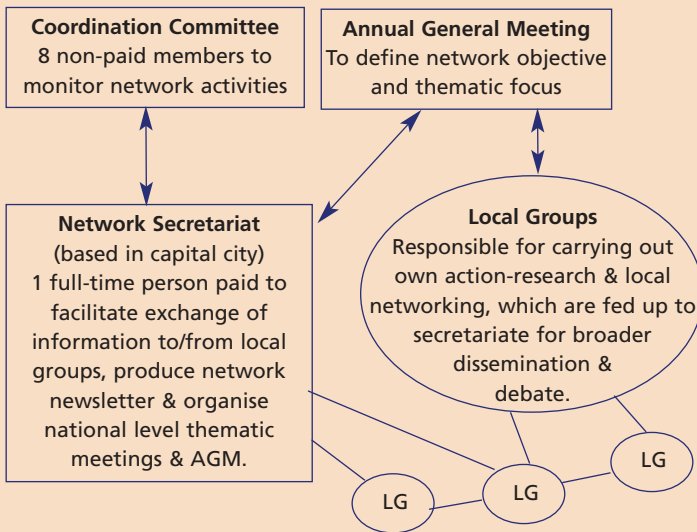
Amadi Coulibaly carried out research to document the dynamics of two communes after the 1999 elections (who were elected councillors, the activities of the council, etc.). Initial research carried out by Coulibaly in 1999, was completed by fieldwork in September 2002 and February 2003 to understand how the rural councils have evolved over the last two years, the challenges they have had to face and how they have dealt with them. This study was published as Drylands Issue Paper number 127, *Implementing decentralisation in Mali: the experiences of two rural councils in southern Mali*, by Amadi Coulibaly and Thea Hilhorst, 2004.

ed it should direct its energies to supporting existing district-level networking initiatives. The latter while representing decentralised focal points for the national network, would retain their independence and continue to manage their activities as before. The onus would be on providing them with support when asked, particularly in the dissemination of the results of their policy analysis to other district-level networks and “upwards” to national decision-makers. To promote this process of peer-group exchange, a small network secretariat was established composed of the network coordinator (unpaid post) and a networking facilitator (full-time salaried post), and a coordination committee to monitor the work of the secretariat (see box 11). The networking facilitator is responsible for the production of a monthly journal (*L’Echo*), of tracking key policy debates at the national level and

feeding them down to the regional level and providing back up support as necessary to the regional focal points.

The network has grown from two focal points in 2001,²² to six by December 2004. In addition, a number of thematic sub-groups have been established within the focal points looking at issues as diverse as local conventions, water, pastoralism, forestry and agriculture. See box 13 on the Tribune pastorale.

Box 11: National network in Niger



After a shaky first year, networking on natural resource management and decentralisation picked up in Niger, particularly with the progressive establishment of regional focal points. Over 2002 and 2003, networking focused not on decentralisation *per se*, but on other key themes of significant importance such as pastoral land tenure, the revision of the Rural Code, the assessment of the decentralised land tenure commissions, and an analysis of the policy making process in Niger among other themes. In 2004, following the

22. The 1st focal point was the Groupe GRN/Elevage based in Zinder, which pre-dated the establishment of the national network and agreed to act as focal point following the 2nd annual meeting. A second focal point was established in Niamey in 2001. Focal points were then established in Tahoua and Maradi in 2002, Agadez in 2003 and Tillabéry in 2004.

successful election of the country's first generation of local government officials, networking activities switched to helping build the capacity of civil society better to understand the stakes at play. Among these activities has been the organisation of two training workshops on the principles and provisions of decentralisation for community radio presenter (see box 12).

A major achievement of the NRM-Decentralisation network in Niger has been the establishment of a decentralised mechanism for information exchange linking civil society actors in the regions with those in Niamey. This is due to the commitment and hard work of a small group of individuals, often working on weekends and without any payment. That the network is recognised by central government and other decision-makers as a key player in national and local policy dialogue, is largely due to their efforts. However, there are still a number of key issues to resolve if the **quality** of the networking is to improve and the mechanism to be sustainable over time. Clarifying and reinforcing the relationship between the secretariat and the regional focal points as well as the issue of funding are two of these issues, which will be addressed in the second phase of the programme.

Box 12: Using rural radio

In Niger, most the population are poorly informed of the provisions and stakes of decentralisation, the effect that it may have on their lives, and the opportunities it provides for participation in decision-making. Consequently, they are not able to engage effectively in this process. The network in Niger decided it would work with certain strategic actors, able to pass on information on decentralisation to a wider audience: radio presenters.

In April 2004, a training session for radio presenters was held in Maradi. The objective was to increase the 28 participants' knowledge of decentralisation processes so that they could design a series of radio broadcasts programmes to inform their audiences and engage in informed debate on the topic.

Senegal: building on local learning groups

Networking in Senegal is driven by IED Afrique who have built on the experience on an earlier regional programme of work seeking to institutionalise participation with a strong emphasis on learning groups at local and regional levels addressing current policy issues of strategic importance to local people and their livelihoods. The learning group approach (described above) is a very effective way of networking. By identifying common strategic issues, actors engage in mutual learning to reflect and act collectively. In Senegal, most of the learning groups were established in the Thies region where new approaches and processes were tested before their broader dissemination to other areas in Senegal or to other Sahelian countries.

Box 13: Tribune pastorale

The *Tribune Pastorale* was created following a workshop organised by the *Secrétariat permanent du Code Rural* on 18 June 2003. It aims to map out a drafting process for the texts dealing with pastoralism that complement the *Code rural*.

After the workshop, several partners gathered expressing the need for a parallel process to complement the official one. One in which civil society – herders and their representatives in particular – would be able to express themselves freely and to put forward their own proposals. This initiative was named the *Tribune Pastorale*.

The *Tribune* was not created in a vacuum but was based on existing debate and information. Due to the lack of resources, it was decided that the *Tribune* should remain informal and would operate by email exchange.

The group aims to **support/feed into the drafting of the texts for the Code Rural on pastoralism**, and to actively bring in the contribution of civil society, NGOs, development projects and partners, and of resource people, through the NRM network.

In the first year, the meetings debated pastoralist terminology, pastoral water programmes, livestock corridors, conflict management, etc. All those debates contributed to the “Pastoral Code” process.

Since then, the drafting of the texts complementing the *Code Rural* on pastoralism underwent some changes, which meant that the *Tribune* outgrew its initial remit. The debates have now opened up to more general questions such as the economics of pastoral production, animal health, the national system for the prevention and management of food crisis, and rural development project activities. Emails have also evolved and foster the sharing of general information (of a factual, institutional or technical nature) on livestock and pastoralism. From 18 June 2003 to 10 May 2005, twenty-one themes were discussed within the group.

The group’s strengths

The *Tribune*’s members, organisers and presenters are very diverse and all strongly motivated. Thus, the *Tribune* not only provides a forum for information exchange (e.g. to share workshop results or the outcomes of national and international meetings) but also triggers interesting (and sometimes contradictory) debates on wide-ranging themes that sometimes lead to action being taken (e.g. Forest Code).

... and weaknesses

However, the participation in the *Tribune* has dropped due mainly to the delay in developing the pastoral code (which lasted for about four years instead of the initial scheduled 18 months) and to the lack of a proper budget (i.e. participation in and the functioning of the *Tribune* depend solely on its members’ goodwill). Lobbying activities have suffered as a result and the dynamism of the group has flagged. Another weakness of the *Tribune* lies in the fact that participatory bodies and other pastoralists are insufficiently involved, and that it does not actively involve the Ministry of Animal Resources.

Policy influence

In June 2005, a synthesis document was produced and given to the people in charge of drafting the law on pastoralism in Niger (*Code Pastoral*): SPCR, ministries, consultants, specialists. The synthesis analyses not only the above-mentioned themes but also the existing sectoral texts, and makes suggestions on all aspects of pastoralism. Thus, although it is not an official document, it has become the main inspiration for the consultants involved in the process.

Source: “GRN-Niger” network (“Making Decentralisation Work” programme)

A national network on local convention was established in 2004 following the regional conference on local conventions in Bamako. Its objective is to promote exchange and learning on the topic between local people and national decision-makers. Activities carried out have included field visits for MPs to meet rural councillors in the Sine Saloum region and see for themselves the merits of local conventions in managing natural resources. These visits were followed up with regular workshops to reflect on process and content of local conventions.

In addition, IED Afrique has brokered an alliance between the National Association of Journalists in Environment and Development (AECD) and the environmental parliamentary group. The focus has been in providing parliamentarians with practical experience and knowledge to inform their decisions. The association has been very helpful both for IED Afrique and member of the parliamentarian network on environment in collecting and disseminating information through the national press.

8. Information and communication

In Phase I, an information and communication unit was established within IED Afrique (formerly IIED-Sahel) to promote policy dialogue on decentralisation at regional level, while providing support to the information requirements of the national networks and the learning groups, particularly in Senegal. It is a crosscutting component of the programme, and as such had to ensure the timely delivery of appropriate and accessible information not only to decision-makers but also local people. Meeting the needs of such a broad constituency is challenge, which the programme addressed through a two-pronged strategy:

- Information dissemination.
- Institutionalising communication.

Information dissemination

Documenting and disseminating information to nurture processes of informed debate within and between actors at different levels on policy issues relevant to local, national and regional development within the context of decentralisation involved a number of activities.

Resource centre and website

A key activity over the past three years has been to create an accessible source of information on decentralisation and the good governance of natural resources. Over one thousand documents on decentralisation and local governance have been entered into a central database within IED Afrique's resource centre, and now constitutes a resource frequently consulted by researchers and students working on decentralisation. A web site dedicated to the programme and its activities was created in 2002 (www.iedafrique.org) on which are posted the key publications and results of programme activities, including a page for each national network. The site has been visited over four thousand times since its creation.

Audiovisual materials

The development of a considerable bank of audio-visual resources has allowed the production of two videos. The first presents the experience of a local convention developed by the village of Mbédap and its neighbours in Senegal to manage their common resources in an inclusive and sustainable manner. The video is an advocacy tool broadcast at community, regional and national levels to share information on local examples of good natural resource management. By facilitating debate at these different levels, the

video helps actors at these different levels to participate in policy design in a more informed manner. The video has been very effective in changing local practice. Since its broadcast in the rural council of Fissel, twenty-eight communities have set up local conventions to manage their common property resources such as forests and water points. The video had a similar impact in the more northerly region of the Ferlo where three rural councils have recently established local conventions better to manage their rangelands.

The second video documents the life history of Coumba Ibra Dieng, a rural woman leader from the Senegal River valley. This video has been produced in the context of the thematic work on gender and decentralization (described above). The video traces Coumba's personal itinerary, highlighting the strategies she has used to overcome the many social and cultural constraints rural women face in making their voice heard bringing about major changes in their communities. In the second phase of the programme, the video will be used as a training and advocacy tool to strengthen women's participation in the decentralisation process.

Box 14: Local convention series

- No 1: Les conventions locales au Sahel: un outil de co-gouvernance en gestion des ressources naturelles. (S.M Tall et B. Guèye). 2003
- No 2 :Les conventions locales au Mali : une grande nébuleuse juridique et un pragmatisme en GRN (Moussa Djiré). 2004
- No 3 :La convention locale de Fandène. Un outil de développement local concerté ? (Marine Rouvel). 2005. Electronic version only (final editing)

Publications

Thirty issues of *Seg Taaba*, the programme's regional newsletter have been produced. Conceived at the regional conference on policy analysis and advocacy in Burkina Faso, the newsletter provided up-to-date information on the policy and practice of decentralisation across the region. It is disseminated by email and by post. Together with the monthly bulletins of the national networks in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (described above) and IED Afrique's website, a solid platform supporting the flow and exchange of timely and relevant information both within and between countries has been created.



Following the regional conference on local conventions in Bamako in December 2003, IED Afrique established a specific series to document best practice on the topic. Three issues have been produced and widely disseminated.

Two practical manuals have been produced providing guidance on how to design a participatory monitoring and evaluation system and how best to use PRA tools to analyse gender relation. They were distributed as source manuals for people in the different MDW networks who could use them when planning and implementing activities linked with these two themes.

Institutionalising communications

Building the skills of key partners at different levels to use a variety of information and communication tools to strengthen their capacities of negotiation and influence in different decision-making fora (e.g. local government, Parliament) is the second area of work in which IED Afrique has been involved. Activities have largely focused on helping local people to design their own communication tools such as local language publications and radio programmes broadcast on community radio stations.

For instance, *Yoor Yooru Fissel*, is the community newspaper of the rural council of Fissel. Entirely written and designed by local extension agents, it provides a medium through which local people can contribute their ideas and learn of those of others on what is happening in the council. One issue was published in 2004. Due the ending of phase I of MDW, financial support could not be provided to publish the second issue. Hopefully, this situation will soon be resolved with the launching of MDW II. However to make this initiative sustainable, it has been agreed that the Fissel community with the support of the rural council, should develop a strategy to fund the newspaper through sales, sponsoring and advertising for local small businesses.

9. Outcomes

Considerable progress has been made in achieving the three core conditions for making decentralisation work. Challenges remain and these will be addressed in phase II. An external evaluation of the programme in 2003 confirmed the pertinence of the programme's objectives and activities, and the appropriateness of its process-led approach to building local and national level capacities for improved governance of natural and other resources for poverty alleviation and conflict management.²³

Condition 1: The full and active involvement of all citizens in the process.

Two implementation strategies were used to achieve this condition in phase I: the design and testing of a training programme on pastoralism and policy in *Pulaar*, and the establishment and facilitation of three thematic learning groups in Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso. The latter, since they were implemented in collaboration with local government authorities are reported on under condition 2 below.

By the end of phase I, the development of a training programme on pastoralism and pastoralism and policy was complete. During the process of its design and testing, the significance of its potential to allow marginalised pastoral and agro-pastoral communities to analyse their situation and participate in local level decision-making processes became apparent. The external evaluation confirmed the relevance of the course not only for empowering pastoral communities, but also for allowing those external to the pastoral system to understand its rationale and its positive contribution to the agricultural sector in the Sahel. The training was also praised for its pedagogic approach combining a mix of techniques to challenge processes of exclusion and marginalisation inherent within many traditional societies. The evaluation found that the test trainings in themselves had raised local people's consciousness of the issues at stake and of the need for them to engage with local decision-making processes if they are to improve their livelihoods. Both men and women participants distinguished themselves from the broader community by their greater confidence and ability to articulate the logic of pastoralism to local councillors and others.

Scaling up the training and implementing it more widely in Senegal and neighbouring countries without losing control over quality is a major challenge identified by the evaluation, which will require careful consideration

23. Rapport d'évaluation du programme Réussir la décentralisation (1^{ère} phase 2000-2004) par André Marty, Hans Eriksson, Ambeïry ag Rhissa, Sten Hagberg et Karolina Jeppson. Janvier 2004.

in phase II. Institutionalising the training within the agendas and activities of civil society groups in order to reinforce their capacities as informed policy advocates, is another major issue requiring attention in phase II.

Condition 2: The willingness and ability of newly elected local government bodies to apply principles of good governance and deliver appropriate, cost-effective and affordable services to their constituents.

The learning groups in Senegal and Mali, though still in progress, have proved to be an effective way to start building inclusive processes at local government level. The approach has created an environment and culture of learning and informed debate within those councils participating in the programme, which didn't exist before. Council leaders are more inclined to listen to local people and increasingly recognise that their re-election is dependent in part on responding to local priorities. There is even some progress with respect to improving women's participation in the affairs of local government. The learning group on gender and development in the rural council of Fissel in Senegal has taken the unprecedented step of allowing non-elected representatives of women organisations to take part in the council meetings and contribute ideas and suggestions.

Audio-visual tools designed by the programme, such as videos, rural radio broadcasts, and rural communities exchange visits have proved to be very effective in facilitating the sharing of experiences and the stimulation of mutual learning among a largely illiterate population, particularly the women. Strong emphasis will be put on the use of such tools in phase II of MDW. This will require strengthening capacities of partners at both local and national levels not only in the use of such tools but also in their production.

The learning group process has not been easy. First, it takes time for the system to establish itself and members of the group to develop the required capacities to carry out collective analysis and implement actions for change. Peer-group learning processes, particularly within local government institutions, are a very new and alien concept and it takes time to break old habits. Furthermore, working with local governments brings new challenges to IIED whose experience, before MDW, has mainly been with civil society organisations and research institutes. Political interests play an important role in shaping elected local leaders' decisions, and getting them to buy into a participatory and inclusive process which seeks genuinely to include civil society requires a lot of effort.

Mainstreaming the learning group approach to other local government authorities and scaling it up to higher levels to reach and involve national decision-makers is the challenge now facing the programme if its activities are to have an impact on the policy environment. Finding the right way to achieve is a key objective of phase two.

Condition 3: The readiness and capacity of the central State to provide a favourable institutional framework, which empowers local-level decision-making and authority.

The national networks in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso have played a leading role in fostering informed dialogue and debate on policy options of relevance to local livelihoods within their respective countries. Through meetings, commissioned research, newsletters, radio programmes, training workshops and other methods, the members of the networks have engaged in lively and relatively well-informed debate on a range of key issues central to the design and implementation of decentralisation policies in the natural resource management sector. Topics have included: how best to implement the transfer of authority for land and resource management to local communities; what tools can be used for decentralised and inclusive natural resource management; and how best to take into account the needs of non-resident groups (e.g. pastoralists) within the context of decentralisation. Some of this debate has reached policy makers either directly through their participation in network events or indirectly through the publications or word of mouth. The work of the national networks has been complemented by a range of regional studies on broader challenges facing the Sahel (e.g. the debate on the role of family farming and large-scale commercial agriculture), supported by a regional communication platform (website, newsletter, publications) ensuring a wide dissemination of findings within the region and beyond.

These activities are contributing to the development of a critical mass of institutions and individuals with an improved understanding of the issues at stake and a heightened awareness of how best to influence policy in their respective countries. The external evaluation saw the networks growing into a broader civil society movement with the capacity to hold government to account. For this to happen, a number of key issues need to be addressed to strengthen the networks' capacities to ensure processes of sustained policy analysis and dialogue, particularly between local and national actors. Documenting and disseminating the content of these debates to a broader audience, and tailoring messages to target specific policy processes remains problematic and is an area requiring further support. Gender is another issue the networks have not sufficiently addressed. These and other issues will be tackled in phase II.

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Annex 2

Phase II

Phase II (2005-9) will build on the achievement of phase I while seeking to address its weaknesses. Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal will remain the priority countries in order to build on not only the achievements of Phase I, but also the portfolio of activities undertaken by IIED in the region over the past 12 years.

Building the capacity of civil society better to understand the issues at stake with respect to natural resource management within a context of decentralisation, and to use this knowledge to articulate their vision of development and influence local and national decision making processes will continue to be the main focus of activities. These will be implemented through three inter-linked thematic areas, which represent not only on-going work from phase I but also new priorities as identified by the national networks and other programme partners.²⁴

The three thematic areas are:

Theme 1: Social accountability and inclusion

Building the capacities of local government bodies to work in a participatory and accountable manner and those of local people to hold their elected officials to account over the manner in which local resources are managed, is a concern that cuts right across the region. Decentralisation is intended to result in better and more effective local development by enabling local people to participate in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes. However, such participation can only be effective if all groups are involved in the decision-making process and have the capacity to call elected local officials to account for their actions. Experience has shown that this is often not the case, and that certain vulnerable groups are excluded from the sphere of decision-making, particularly over natural resources. These groups include women, young people and groups such as pastoralists.

Phase I of the programme designed a set of tools and approaches to address issues of social accountability and inclusion. Learning groups in Senegal and Mali have developed procedures to enable elected local councillors to act in a more transparent manner when taking decisions (participatory planning

24. The three thematic areas represent generic cross-cutting issues as identified by partners, and particularly the national networks, at the programme third annual meeting in Ouagadougou, January 2004.

and budgeting, effective information and communication systems), while building the capacity of local people to hold them to account. Two training programmes in local languages have also been designed. The first, to enable pastoral communities to understand the rationale of their livelihood system in the broader policy context and thereby play a more effective role in local decision-making processes that affect their lives. The second, to enable female rural extension agents to understand the social, cultural and political factors that prevent women from fully participating in the decentralisation process.

In phase II, these tools and approaches will be implemented with a view to extending them all four countries in which the programme works. Attention will be paid to documenting their impact and sharing these lessons with the communities concerned as well as local and national decision-makers.

Theme 2: Good governance of natural resources

In much of the Sahel, competition over land and other natural resources has increased dramatically over the past few decades. In many areas, population pressures and socio-cultural change have eroded the “customary” arrangements for reconciling competing resource interests – particularly pastoralism and agriculture. Competition is particularly acute for scarce “strategic” resources, such as the few irrigated lands, and dry season water points and pastures. In some cases, well meaning but ill-conceived government interventions (e.g. the creation of water points) have fostered conflict and resource degradation.

In order for decentralisation to succeed, local governments need to take up these challenges. By creating democratic fora at the local level, decentralisation offers new opportunities for local populations to discuss and reconcile their competing views and needs. To do this, local governments need to be equipped with appropriate tools, such as “local conventions”, and to be able to address the complexities of resource management decisions, such as the land tenure implications of water management. This requires action-research, to better understand issues and to document successful experiences; learning groups, to promote discussions between practitioners and policy-makers; and networking, to promote an informed policy debate in which all stakeholders have a fair say. Together, these activities will contribute to better policies, institutions and programmes.

Work in Phase II will build on the work undertaken in phase I on Local Conventions while starting work on a new area, the interface between water rights, land tenure and decentralisation.

Theme 3: Harnessing natural resources for local development

For decentralisation to succeed, local governments must be able effectively to support the livelihoods of their constituents through income-generating activities. In much of rural Sahel, natural resources constitute the main basis for such activities. Also, the natural beauty and cultural heritage of several Sahelian countries is attracting increasing numbers of tourists (Air-Ténéré in Niger, Timbuktu and Gao in Mali).

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. Although West Africa has not yet reached the same level of involvement in this industry as East Africa, it is becoming an increasingly important destination for tourists looking for a “wilderness experience”. This constitutes a precious opportunity for local development and poverty reduction, and for local government bodies to mobilise much-needed resources. It also poses many challenges to ensure it contributes to a sustainable and just process of development. Local and national government still have little understanding of the linkages between global tourism, decentralisation and local development. Better understanding of how they can benefit from this business and use part of the proceeds to fund service provision and other development activities is central to informing policy.

For each thematic area, activities are planned at local, district, national and regional levels that address one or more of the three core conditions/specific objectives of the programme.

Supporting civil society engagement in decentralisation processes is a long-term goal. Achieving an efficient and effective decentralised system of local government is complex work and requires activities on many levels in collaboration with a wide range of actors. This second phase is, therefore, only a part of a longer term IIED’s commitment to work with partners in the region and externally on this issue.

Making Decentralisation Work

Decentralisation offers real opportunities for local people to have a say in the decisions that affect their everyday lives. It is introducing a radical new agenda involving civil society and the private sector in areas traditionally controlled by central State authorities promising greater efficiency in the delivery of appropriate services tailored to local needs, local democracy and better management of natural resources. Together, these benefits are expected to contribute significantly to poverty reduction through better representation of the poor and improved targeting of service delivery. But will these opportunities be realised? IIED, together with a range of in-country partners, is striving to create the core conditions to *make decentralisation work* in the Sahel. Responding to government policies to devolve greater decision-making powers and resources from central government to elected local government bodies, the *Making Decentralisation Work* programme is supporting activities in three key areas:

- Building the capacity of local people and their organisations to influence the local and national level decisions that affect their lives.
- Building the capacity of local institutions, particularly elected government bodies, to be inclusive and accountable in the management of local affairs.
- Building the capacity of central government to create a broad policy environment, which empowers local level decision-making and authority, while ensuring principles of equity and sustainability.

This publication documents the main findings of the first phase of work.

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