

Dryland Networks Programme

ISSUE PAPER

Participatory Forestry

**A national seminar for Malian NGOs
- Segou, Mali, 19-21 September 1988 -
(Summary Report)**

IIED

**INTERNATIONAL
INSTITUTE FOR
ENVIRONMENT AND
DEVELOPMENT**

**Paper No. 3
November
1988**

Participatory Forestry

A seminar on participatory forestry was organised by the co-ordinating committee for NGOs in Mali (CCA-ONG) with the support of IIED's Forestry and Land Use Programme in Segou, Mali, from 19 to 21 September 1988.

There were 28 participants, including representatives from eleven Malian, one Burkinabe and two international NGOs; two international voluntary organisations and the farming community they work with; and two government agencies.

On the first day, participants presented and discussed their current forestry and forestry-related activities, which had often just started and were still being undertaken on a very modest scale.

Then, to give some idea of the possibilities for NGO activity in this field, Mr Yaya Ouedraogo, a staff member of the Burkinabe NGO Six S, presented his organisation's longstanding work with farmers constructing rockbunds to increase water infiltration and reduce erosion in the Yatenga region in Burkina Faso. His presentation stressed the importance of a genuine participatory approach in working with villagers.

The second day programme consisted of a field trip to the village forest of Fassou in Niono district, a project of the Forestry Department supported by the Dutch Association for Development Assistance. Interesting discussions were held with the beneficiaries at the project site. A visit was also paid to a farmer near Markala who had - on his own initiative - interplanted his sorgho field with Borassus palms, and was currently earning 1,000,000 FCFA annually from the sale of their produce: sponges, timber fruits and mats.

On the final day there were presentations and discussions on the various strategies employed in Mali in the fight against desertification; the linkages between pastoralism and forestry, and the relevance of these linkages to NGO projects; and on the possible role of Malian NGOs in the Tropical Forestry Action Plan exercise in Mali.

Conclusions and recommendations of the seminar were:

- There is an insufficiency of technical competence on the forestry side among Malian NGOs. Therefore, forestry training should be pursued in co-operation with the government departments involved and with NGOs in the neighbouring countries;
- There is a strong need for co-ordination of NGO activities, in order to enable NGOs to learn from each other's experiences. The fact that co-ordinating structures already in place are not optimally used is due rather to personal attitudes than to institutional shortcomings;
- Any NGO intervention should start with a thorough identification of the needs, problems and possibilities of the population involved, in order to enable NGOs to come up with concrete projects that address real problems and are adapted to the local context. Indigenous knowledge is to be an important input in this process;
- There is a lack of funds for pre-project studies; funding agencies should fund NGOs to do these;
- The seminar recommends that the CCA-ONG participate in the coming roundtable for forestry donors, in order to highlight the role NGOs could play in the further elaboration and execution of the National Anti-Desertification Plan and the Tropical Forestry Action Plan.

Also:

- Malian NGOs have only limited capacity for problem definition, both because of a lack of experience with participatory intervention methodologies such as Rapid Rural Appraisal, and the absence of funds for this phase in the project cycle (fundes prefer to put up money for physical targets such as numbers of trees planted rather than for much-needed, accurate pre-project studies).

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