

Drylands Programme

ISSUES PAPER



CILSS/ CLUB DU SAHEL

The Segou Experience: landmarks to guide concerted action

*Regional Encounter in Segou (Mali)
on local-level natural resource
management, May 22-27, 1989*

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The town of Segou, Mali, was the setting for a Regional Encounter in May which brought together representatives of the three principal partners of rural development in the Sahel: rural organisations, officials of governments and aid donors, on the theme of local-level natural resource management. The Encounter agreed on an eight-point programme of action contained in its final statement, *The Segou Experience*.

Haramata is pleased to present this document on behalf of CILSS and the Club du Sahel. A fuller report of the meeting is now in preparation and will be available in due course from the sponsoring organisations. A second paper from the Segou Encounter - 'Women and the struggle against desertification in the Sahel,' by Marie Monimart - will be published in the Issues Envelope with the December edition of *Haramata*.

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FROM THE NOUAKCHOTT STRATEGY TO A REGIONAL CONSULTATIVE
APPROACH: THE SEGOU EXPERIENCE

For twenty years, the Sahel has suffered from persistent drought and ecological degradation, which combined with the economic crisis and population growth have put considerable strain on the Sahelians and have hampered the development efforts of the countries in the region.

At the initiative of the CILSS and the Club du Sahel, Sahelian leaders met in Nouakchott in 1984 to discuss the situation. Proposals were made there for a desertification control strategy. Such a strategy was subsequently adopted by all the Sahelian countries, and received the support of those countries' partners in the international community.

Since Nouakchott, Sahelian governments have drawn up national plans for desertification control and socio-economic development. They have also embarked upon large-scale programs to put those plans into action.

- 1) It has become apparent that these programs and projects have encountered problems in transforming the key points in the Nouakchott strategy into concrete action (e.g. popular participation, local level natural resource management, the global approach).
- 2) At the same time, it has become clear that a growing number of local development initiatives by rural organisations of all kinds have been successful in all types of agro-ecological situations. However, these initiatives have not spread on a larger scale in a process of sustained development.
- 3) Similarly, development partners expressed concern that their aid was having little real effect on promoting sustained development in the Sahel.
- 4) Meanwhile, the effects of desertification have continued to spread, further aggravating the socio-economic difficulties encountered by Sahelian population groups, their organizations, and governments.

Recognizing this situation, the CILSS and the Club du Sahel decided to organize in Segou a consultation meeting bringing together the three parties involved in the development process: rural population groups, represented by their local organizations, governments, and their partners in the international community, and NGOs).

The Segou Encounter was the first of its kind, and its primary objective was to apply to practical situations the concepts of popular participation, local level management of natural resources and the global approach so that the Sahel can undertake to move towards sustained development.

The debates in Segou were open, fruitful and lively. A wide variety of successful initiatives were used as the basis of discussions, and all the participants put across their respective viewpoints in a spirit of mutual respect. At the Segou meeting, rural organizations, governments and development partners outlined a frame of reference for the future, within which the success of all subsequent endeavours can be measured.

LANDMARKS TO GUIDE CONCERTED ACTION

1) Ecological rehabilitation: restore a degraded asset

Problems of land tenure, outdated production systems and farming techniques, and successive droughts have led to serious degradation of the natural environment. Part of this initial capital has thus been lost, and there is now an urgent need to reconstitute those assets.

The cost of this rehabilitation is high. Many techniques could be used: certain could be applied immediately by local groups, while others are more complex and costly, and depend on government action. Local populations' awareness and determination to participate in the rehabilitation process are essential but not sufficient.

External aid will be indispensable, as good intentions at the local level clearly have their limits. If producers are struggling just to make their farming operations survive, they will tend to favour solutions that generate income in the short term. Rehabilitation, on the other hand, involves investments that will only pay off in the medium to long term. Incentives and aid in the form of logistic support, supplementary income, etc., should thus be made available so that producers will make the necessary long-term improvements. In this respect, future structural adjustment programs will have to take ecological constraints into account adequately.

Furthermore, land rehabilitation must be seen not only as a way of conserving the environment, but above all as a way of improving production and generating sources of incomes in order to cover the costs incurred by producers.

For effective action to be taken, technical support from the relevant government departments is needed. Thus, those

departments must have the means to fulfil their roles.

2) Local level natural resource management: share responsibility with local communities

Ecological rehabilitation involves systematic management of renewable natural resources at the local level. Numerous techniques must be used here. Certain are suitable for grazing land, while others must be applied to the local areas that are suffering from ecological deterioration. Areas with higher rainfall call for yet other techniques which are better suited to more intensive forms of agriculture.

Not everybody knows about these techniques, and efforts must be made to disseminate them and to stimulate experience-sharing. Research and development initiatives must seek to address the problems encountered by those who are most closely concerned.

The fact that suitable techniques exist is clearly not enough. Rural population groups must also organize themselves in an efficient manner. A wide variety of rural organizations and institutions already exist to deal with specific problems (management of forests, watersheds, grazing land, etc.). Most importantly, these organizations should be autonomous in their day-to-day operations, in training, and in management. In this respect, one basic requirement is for the legal system to recognize the existence of these organizations.

3) Decentralized management: increase efficiency

Governments will encourage local communities to shoulder greater responsibility if those communities show that they are genuinely able to take their development in hand. But for this transition to happen, government departments will have to help local communities to become more aware of the issues involved and will have to transfer responsibility for certain activities from the public sector to these communities.

The state must take new institutional steps to guarantee and monitor local development. Comprehensive land-use planning is needed to rationalize investments, and rural development policies must seek to increase the incomes of rural inhabitants and help a non-governmental sector to take shape.

Similarly, as part of the international community's efforts to move closer to rural organizations in order to increase the effectiveness of outside aid, donors could decentralize to their local agencies part of their procedures and decision-making power.

Since the three families of actors - local organizations, Sahelian governments and donors - are to act as partners, the ground rules of partnership must be established as clearly as possible.

4) Land tenure reform: hedge local investments

Land tenure poses numerous problems of various types at the local level, and many of those problems have become acute as available land is in greater and greater demand. There is thus a need to find a flexible way of combining the modern legal system - which is still insufficiently known - with customary laws. One solution would be to consult producer organizations in the event of disputes.

One aspect of the land tenure issue that is particularly worrisome is the development of the land market in certain areas. The poorest, marginalized producers, who are forced to sell fields to bolster their incomes, subsequently have no choice but to overfarm their remaining land, thereby contributing to ecological degradation. Newly landless farmers are swelling the ranks of the unemployed in the cities. Suitable rules are needed to avoid these problems.

In the short term, the central problem is the lack of security of investments in the land. Producers will continue to be unable to invest in improving the land if they are unsure of reaping the benefits later. Legislative solutions must be found.

5) Local credit and savings: increase local investment

The success of credit and savings systems depend on the development of viable local voluntary organizations (cooperatives, associations, etc.) based on mutual trust.

Attempts to set up savings and credit systems that meet local requirements should be encouraged.

Nevertheless, links between these systems and the banking system poses various problems that must be solved:

- liquidation periods on loans to producers should be lengthened to take into account the uncertainty of income levels due to climatic variations;
- similarly, the amount of collateral demanded from producers must remain flexible in order to take local situations into account;
- loan contracts must be clear and firm so that borrowers are fully aware of their commitments from the outset.

More globally, the insecurity of prices and markets discourages producers from contracting loans. Governments policy should thus promote conditions that limit excessive fluctuations in the prices of the main crops, assist producer organizations in gaining a better understanding of market trends, and promote processing, conservation and marketing of local produce. Food aid must be integrated into this global approach.

6) Women's participation: make it work

The historic role of women in rural areas has been altered by desertification and rural exodus. As a result, women today are performing different tasks, and, in particular, they play an essential part in ecological rehabilitation and local level natural resource management.

However, their formal status within society is still incongruous with this new level of responsibility that they are assuming. Increasingly, women are asking for sufficient land so that they can meet their monetary requirements; they are seeking access to farm machinery and, therefore, credit facilities; and they wish to take part in the decisions that affect the life of the community.

Training is needed in those areas of activity where women are now involved. Extension work is now too often aimed exclusively at the men. In addition, aid should be made available in order to lighten women's day-to-day workload and to diversify productive and other activities enabling them to find new sources of income.

7) Information and training: share experiences

Local experience is particularly useful. Valuable lessons can be learned from successes as well as from failures. Rural inhabitants are eager to find out about these experiences and appraise them directly.

If experience sharing is organized and encouraged, ideas progress faster and reach wider audiences. A genuine communication policy should be adopted in order to achieve these aims. Such a policy addressing the major issues facing the rural world would accord rural problems the priority they deserve. This communication policy would mobilize the mass media as well as alternative channels of information, and would include visits and experience sharing by representatives of the rural areas of different Sahelian countries.

To consolidate efforts to improve agricultural and environmental rehabilitation techniques, close attention should be paid to the

development of management and leadership skills required for the management autonomy of local communities. Experience sharing is needed here also, but suitable training is an even more pressing requirement.

8) Population and development: control the future

In view of the ecological, social and economic environment of the Sahel, the question of the population policies that will underpin sustained development should be examined in the light of the N'Djamena Plan of Action.

It is of primary importance to involve local population groups in the definition and implementation of these policies.

THE SEGOU REGIONAL ENCOUNTER:

- wishes the Sahelian governments to consider the frame of reference outlined at Segou and to work within that framework whenever appropriate;
- calls upon rural organizations, the Sahelian governments and their partners in the international community to nurture the spirit of Segou by organizing three-sided coordination meetings so that concrete action can be taken to promote sustained development throughout the Sahel;
- requests the CILSS and the Club du Sahel to take guidance from the Segou landmarks and to continue their examination of the issues involved.

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LES DOCUMENTS DE BASE

- Développement rural durable au Sahel: le rôle des organisations rurales (Société Typici) RFL: RC-08
- Approche de la politique des Etats sahéliens en matière de développement rural intégré et de lutte contre la désertification (Abdoulaye Kane et Sylviane Quédrago) RFL: RC-08
- Evolution des stratégies de lutte contre la sécheresse et la désertification des principaux organismes donateurs dans le Sahel (Chris Reij) RFL: D-328
- Femmes et développement durable au Sahel (Marie Hamout et Harba Oula-Diana) RFL: D-330

LES DOCUMENTS D'APPUI A LA RENCONTRE

- Exemples de développement durable - gestion durable des ressources naturelles dans le Sahel (Sheela s.a.) RFL: RC-08
 - Le Sahel en lutte contre la désertification - leçons d'expériences (redaction Recherche) RFL: RC-04
 - Ecologie et développement rural en Afrique subsaharienne: une sélection d'études de cas (Wright, Weber, Bradbury) RFL: D-327
 - Options pour promouvoir le contrôle et la gestion par les villageois des ressources naturelles renouvelables au Sahel (Thomson s.a.) RFL: RC-07
 - Dynamique d'organisations du monde rural (Sraech) RFL: D-325
 - Femmes et lutte contre la désertification au Sahel (Monnier) RFL: D-328
 - Le crédit et l'épargne ruraux dans le Sahel (Cajuto) RFL: RC-02
 - Politique foncière et gestion des ressources naturelles au Sahel (Lavery) RFL: RC-06
 - Analyse des textes législatifs et réglementaires des pays membres du CILSS en matière de gestion des ressources naturelles (publication CILSS: Rédaction: Goumardakaya) RFL: RC-04
 - L'occupation des eaux et des sols dans le Sahel (Koumthui Fie) RFL: D-329
 - Perspectives d'amélioration de la productivité du sorgho et du mil en Afrique de l'Ouest (Hutton) RFL: RC-01
 - L'élevage dans les pays sahéliens (F. Pons) RFL: D-311
- Ces documents sont disponibles au Club du Sahel (OCDE Zura Anréé Pascal 75725 Paris Cedex 19 France)
et au CILSS BP 7049 OUAGADOUGOU BURKINA FASO