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**ISSUES PAPER**

## **From Woodlots to Village Land Management in the Sahel**

**Ibrahima Guèye  
Peter Laban**

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#### *About the authors*

Ibrahima Guèye is Deputy Director of the Forest Service of Senegal; he is a forester and has many years' of experience in both community forestry and agroforestry.

Peter Laban has had extensive experience in natural resource management and community forestry in India, Nepal and the Sahel region. He is now an environmental specialist at the International Agriculture Centre in Wageningen, the Netherlands.

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# **From Woodlots to Village Land Management in the Sahel**

**Ibrahima Guèye  
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## From woodlots to village land management in the Sahel

Ibrahima Gueye<sup>1</sup> and Peter Laban<sup>2</sup>

### SUMMARY

This paper presents experience from francophone West Africa with approaches to involve local people in the management of natural resources, mainly taken from community forestry programmes carried out by the Forestry Services with support from bilateral and multilateral agencies. Development of community forestry approaches started roughly at the end of the 1970s and in the last ten years have evolved from a focus on communal woodlots to a wide variety of tree-related activities ranging from mixed tree/vegetable/nursery gardens and other agro-forestry systems to management of natural vegetation. During the last 5 years, increasing attention has been given to the need to integrate woodland management in the overall land use system. This has resulted in the formulation of a concept now known as 'Gestion de Terroir Villageois', which can be translated as integrated Village Land Management (VLM).

We discuss here the achievements and weaknesses of each approach, as well as their strong points and constraints. It is concluded that the participatory community forestry approach brings an essential contribution to the integrated management of land and other natural resources (VLM). More attention must now be given to the strengthening of well-functioning village groups, the transfer to the local level of formal responsibility for natural resource management, and better knowledge of alternative technical interventions.

Both community forestry and village land management are part of a long term process that should take inspiration from the Malian proverb that says: 'We are in a hurry, so we have to walk slowly'.

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<sup>1</sup> Direction des Eaux et Forêts, des Chasses et de la Conservation des Sols (DEFCCS), Dakar, Sénégal.

<sup>2</sup> International Agricultural Centre (IAC), Wageningen, The Netherlands.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. General**

This paper outlines experience gained in West Africa with local level management of natural resources. It reflects general developments in community forestry and integrated Village Land Management in the francophone sahelian countries, but is based on the authors' particular experience in Senegal and Burkina Faso, over more than ten years. The paper hopes to increase understanding of the complexities, limitations and potential of both sectoral and more comprehensive approaches to local level environmental management.

### **1.2. Context**

Since 1968 the Sahel region has suffered from persistent drought. In the 1970s, forest cover, consisting mainly of tree and bush savannah, still accounted for more than 50% of the land area, but it is estimated that in Burkina Faso 50,000 ha of forest are cleared yearly for agricultural purposes, in Senegal 100,000 ha and in Mali 300 to 400,000 ha.. Rapidly increasing population growth (2.7%/year) forces the population into more and more marginal lands for agriculture. The resulting land degradation is aggravated by irregular and low rainfall, by high livestock densities, and by the emigration of young men to cities and neighbouring countries, which constrains the use of traditional land conservation measures. Over-exploitation of forests for fuelwood and other tree products is also an important cause of deforestation and reduced productive capacity of the natural vegetation. This may be illustrated by the fact that in many of the region's capitals, the poor urban population now spends between 20 and 30% of their income on fuelwood, while in rural areas women are spending more and more time searching for fuelwood. In Burkina Faso the resulting over-exploitation (1,35 million m<sup>3</sup>/year) of woody vegetation cover is roughly equivalent to the total wood stock on 80,000 ha of forested land (Visser, 1986).

### **1.3. Evolution of Community Forestry towards Village Land Management**

At the end of the 1970s, given unsatisfactory results from earlier large scale 'industrial' plantations, a community forestry approach was initiated. Large scale plantations had been a first response to the land degradation processes and fuelwood shortages aggravated by the severe droughts of the early 1970s. The

CILSS (Comité Inter-Etats de Lutte Contre la Secheresse au Sahel) and the Club de Sahel played an important role in drawing attention in the Sahel and donor countries to these problems. To realise these large scale plantations vast tracts of land were cleared of natural forest, while high recurrent costs, a high degree of mechanisation, weak integration of project activities in those of the regular forest service and above all the lack of participation of surrounding villages contributed to their very poor performance. The participation of rural populations in forestry activities was increasingly perceived as essential and resulted in 1979 in the first two village forestry projects in Burkina Faso supported by Switzerland and the Netherlands. These projects are now operational in 15 provinces, and are coordinated by and integrated with the Forest Service. In Senegal similar work started in 1982 with a community reforestation programme in the groundnut basin (PRECOBA, Fatick), funded by Finland and executed by the Government and FAO. Now, in about 8 different districts of Senegal similar village forestry projects have been carried out. Community forestry (foresterie rurale, foresterie villageoise) has become an important priority of the forest services, reflected in the large number of community forestry projects in these countries supported by FAO and bilateral donors, and with the following general objectives:

- An important degree of autonomy for village communities over management of natural resources within their own village territory.
- The protection, regeneration and management of natural vegetation in the provinces in which projects operate.
- The supply of forest products (fuelwood, construction wood, fodder, fruits and other) needed by rural and urban populations.
- Improved environment within and surrounding villages (shade, micro-climate, erosion control, etc.).
- The institutional strengthening of the central and provincial forest services, to make them better able to contribute to rural development.

In the early phases of community forestry projects, activities were oriented mainly to tree planting. In the first years this usually took the form of communal woodlots but now include hedges, windbreaks, and agroforestry. In the second half of the 1980s, it became increasingly apparent that the approaches used were too forestry-oriented to be effective. Reflection on these issues was helped by auto-evaluation and self-criticism within the projects. As early as 1982, extension methods had already been developed by the forestry service in Burkina Faso, to sensitise rural populations on the need for overall management of their village territory. Integrated management of natural resources at village level, referred to in this paper as Village Land Management

(Gestion du Terroir Villageois), was picked up by integrated rural development projects and given political weight with its adoption by important funding agencies like the World Bank. The latter has contributed especially to the important emphasis now given in Sahelian countries to this approach.

For reasons of presentation, discussion of the Community Forestry and Village Land Management approach is separated in different sections, but it has to be emphasised here that the two must be seen as complementary elements within one overall process.

## **2. Evaluation of the Community Forestry approach**

### **2.1. Development of the approach**

Natural resource management approaches in West Africa started in the 1970s with a strong emphasis on woody vegetation. Programmes were mainly implemented by Forest Services with support from bilateral donors and FAO. Basic elements of the approach are the following:

1. *Raising and mobilising awareness* among village populations about environmental degradation and the need to undertake corrective action in their immediate surroundings.
2. *Extension* of tree planting, nursery, agroforestry and soil and water conservation techniques by the Forest Service.
3. Support for *vocational training and supervision* of forestry extension personnel by higher level staff and technical assistance.
4. Support to the Forest Service by regional institutes such as CESAO<sup>3</sup> and GRAAP<sup>4</sup> respectively in training staff in extension methods and in developing pedagogic tools used in raising awareness and forestry extension.
5. Support to the Forest Service from donor agencies for institutional strengthening, infrastructural support and technical assistance.

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<sup>3</sup> CESAO: Centre d'Etudes Socio-économiques de l'Afrique de l'Ouest

<sup>4</sup> GRAAP: Groupe de Recherche et d'Appui à l'Autopromotion Paysanne

Central to this approach has been the participatory and pedagogic approach ('Vivre dans un Environnement Vert') developed by GRAAP to mobilise awareness about environmental degradation and villagers' own capacities to manage their resources. This approach starts with a process of SEEING (what happens and has happened in their surrounding environment), REFLECTING (on causes and consequences, problem analysis) and ACTING (deciding on what actions can be undertaken by themselves), and is supported by visual aids and elaborate instruction guides for extension personnel. Intended to be one element of a participatory decision process, it includes sessions on (CESAO, Burkina Faso):

- .. knowing the village environment
- .. articulating actual problems by villagers
- .. selection and analysis of these problems with villagers
- .. searching for solutions with villagers
- .. deciding and identifying actions to be undertaken by villagers
- .. evaluating actions with villagers

At every stage of the process three important questions are relevant: What to do? Why? How? (Compaoré, 1991).

Mobilising awareness has been mainly carried out by forest service field personnel; in Burkina Faso collaboration was also developed with extension workers of the semi-governmental regional Rural Development Organisations ('Organizations Régionales de Développement' or ORD's). Due to insufficient priority and commitment from these ORD's, as well as the other numerous tasks demanded from these extension agents, this collaboration came to an end in the late 1980s. Extension intensity was never very high due to lack of personnel; in general, a forestry agent had to cover from 15 to 30 villages. In several cases field personnel were complemented by additional extension staff paid directly by donor-supported projects.

Since 1985, an important new element has been added to forestry work - the active involvement of village level facilitators, often called 'paysans forestiers' (peasant foresters) who, although unpaid by the project or forest service, act as an intermediary between government officials and villagers to enhance forestry related activities (tree planting, nurseries, forest protection, wood stoves). Up until 1983/84, activities had been largely oriented to woodlots. In the mid-eighties an important swing has taken place towards diversifying activities, from communal to farm forestry, from government to village nurseries, from



woodlots to a whole range of other tree-related activities: windbreaks, hedges on field boundaries and around nurseries, mixed tree/vegetable gardens, vegetative reinforcement of soil and water conservation measures and protection and management of natural vegetation, protection for regeneration of valuable indigenous species in farm land (*Acacia albida*, *Butyrospermum paradoxum*, *Parkia biglobosa*) and other agroforestry practices.

After more than 10 years' field experience, the approaches to forestry can be characterised by the following points:

- Promoting an important degree of *self-reliance* as regards the management of natural resources within a community's territory; self-reliance implies sustainability of and community responsibility for such management.
- Promoting and developing *micro projects*, within the reach of the villagers, based on the use of local resources and knowledge, and integrated in their daily life.
- Promoting forestry activities which *meet their priority needs* (agriculture, water, animal husbandry, etc.) thereby ensuring short term benefits are associated with longer term objectives.
- Stressing the need for *active participation* in decision making, planning, execution, benefit sharing and evaluation by the primary target groups involved.
- Limiting or even *abolishing external incentives* (food, metal fences, money subsidies, etc.) in favour of accompanying actions (wells, vegetable gardening) and structural incentives (favourable legislation, price structures, etc.).
- Promoting both individual and collective activities with village groups but giving particular attention to *combined individual/collective activities*.
- *Associating women* as much as possible by involving their traditional organisations.
- Associating local communities with the exploitation of the forests, and enhancing their *responsibility* for it.
- Promoting *participatory research* for the development of new solutions and technologies.
- Promoting *small forestry enterprises* (treatment of local fruits; carpentry, etc.).
- Assuring *training* in forestry techniques and management for rural populations.
- Recognising that such approaches can only be effective when *supported by national policies* on legislation, price setting, education, research, extension, planning and management.

## 2.2. Achievements of and setbacks for community forestry

Village land management approaches are only very recent and are therefore difficult to evaluate now. Here we will focus mainly on successes and failures of community forestry approaches. It has to be noted here that the degree of success or failure depends on your perspective: realising 60% of an objective is a success when compared to 5% achieved perhaps ten years ago but is viewed as failure when compared to an assumed goal of 100%.

### 2.2.1. Achievements

Many achievements are difficult to measure, which underlines the role of community forestry within a long term strategy towards local level natural resource management rather than as a short term project.

- Although village tree planting has not met completely the high expectations raised at the start of this kind of programme, since the end of the 1970s it has significantly increased in multiple forms and become an important component in many development activities in the Sahel/Sudan region.
- Tree planting programmes have helped mobilise awareness amongst local populations of environmental degradation in their immediate surroundings and led to measures being taken to limit such processes.
- While the effects of such long term sensitisation programmes will not be visible in the short term, recent studies (CESAO, 1984; YAMEOGO, 1985; KEMPEN, 1986) indicate that attitudes have started to change.
- Community forestry programmes have promoted a greater role for village inhabitants over local level management of natural resources and have strengthened women's groups especially.
- Village tree nurseries have spread, especially where the free distribution of seedlings has been abandoned.
- Diversification of tree-related activities has been a major achievement of community forestry in the Sahel - from the original communal woodlots to different forms of agroforestry, multiple use gardens and management of natural forest.
- Community forestry programmes have helped change attitudes amongst forestry personnel from repression to rural development, brought the Forest Service out of their isolation and integrated forestry in other land use activities.
- Considerable changes in forest policies have been proposed, such as in Senegal (Code Forestier), to give management responsibilities and usufruct rights over state owned natural forest to village user groups.

- Community forestry activities have now been carried out in more than 3000 villages in Burkina Faso (out of a total of around 7500), between 1000 and 1500 in Senegal and over 1000 in Mali.
- Both in Senegal and Burkina Faso, forestry extension has been institutionalized by the creation of specific units within the Forestry Departments.

### 2.2.2. Setbacks

After the first years of enthusiasm, disappointing results in physical terms (number of woodlots and trees planted) have led to criticism. The main 'failures' of the community forestry programmes are:

- Little impact on processes of environmental degradation (soil compaction, sheet and gully erosion, desertification).
- Little impact on the imbalance between production and consumption of fuelwood.
- Inability to respond to the main priorities of farmers.
- The highly sectoral approach, addressing only tree-related problems and activities.

Most of these failures can be seen as the result of unrealistic expectations or wrong assumptions at the outset of projects.

It is indeed unrealistic to expect that micro projects, such as tree planting at the village level, could check environmental degradation processes, that occur on a far larger scale. It is equally unrealistic to imagine that wood growth from planted trees, under the very marginal ecological conditions (poor soils, scarce rainfall, low carrying capacity) and extremely low price levels, could offset rapidly increasing fuelwood consumption. (A woodlot of 1 ha would just be sufficient to provide yearly fuelwood for 1 or 2 persons; more than 90% of fuelwood comes from natural vegetation rather than planted stands). As concerns the inability to respond to people's first priorities, it must be asked whether this is a failure or an important constraint faced by any environmental programme where long term goals conflict with the need for short term direct benefits, given the very marginal living conditions for farmers in the Sahel. Nevertheless, as in every learning process, mistakes have been made in the development of community forestry interventions which have meant that some results have been disappointing.

## 2.3. Factors influencing the effectiveness of the community forestry approach

### 2.3.1. Weaknesses

In spite of achievements, a number of weaknesses in the approach can be detected, due to which original expectations have not been met.

- Programmes have too often assumed that a village is a *homogenous* unit and thus not taken into consideration the existence of different groups, each with their specific needs, priorities and often conflicting interests. Partly this is due to the impatience of national and especially donor authorities who expect quick, visible and quantifiable results, but is also due to the limited knowledge available on village realities. This could be improved by giving much more attention to proper target group identification and selection at the outset.
- There is still *little emphasis on strengthening community organisations* involved in community forestry programmes. There is certainly too little knowledge within the forest service and the projects concerned about methods for encouraging participation, organisation and responsibility within village communities. Little attention is paid to local knowledge regarding use and management of trees and natural vegetation. Direct participation and decision-making in the design of village activities still need much more emphasis.
- The training methods developed by GRAAP in 1982, to enhance VLM (*Etre Maître de son terroir*), proved at that time to be too difficult to be handled by forestry extension staff. Only in the second half of the 1980s have these been amended to allow for general use as an extension tool.
- *Claims to and rights over land and trees* are often insufficiently clear and form constraints for tree planting and protection natural vegetation. Land and tree tenure, and their impact within community forestry and VLM has to be studied in much more detail in different ecological socio-economic situations.
- The tight restrictions set by *low to very low carrying capacities* for agricultural production, livestock development, woodgrowth and agroforestry systems have rarely been considered in developing new interventions. Recent studies now emphasise that the potential for agroforestry in the Sahel/Sudan zone may be much more limited than had been generally assumed (KESSLER, 1991)).
- Limited *participatory research on appropriate technical interventions* has hampered the development of a range of solutions for farmers that are within their capacities and interests. Especially in the first half of the 1980s, only a very small number of activities could be suggested to villagers, many of

which were neither attractive nor feasible.

- *Cost-free distribution of seedlings* by the forest service has not encouraged farmers to engage in private seedling production. In most countries this issue is now under review.

### 2.3.2 Strong points

Apart from the achievements mentioned before, the following strong points of the community forestry approach, as developed in sahelian francophone West Africa can be mentioned.

- The very positive influence on forestry extension of the pedagogic *participatory tools and methodology* as developed by CESAO and GRAAP in Burkina Faso (see par. 2.1. f). These methods are now used in many other FAO and bilateral supported programmes in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal.
- The introduction of '*peasant foresters*' has greatly increased contacts between the Forest Services and villagers.
- Wood stove programmes and the important number of '*animatrices*' (women extension staff) has brought a particular focus to *women's interests in forestry*. Especially in Senegal, women's groups are important channels to promote tree related activities (woodlots and multiple use gardens).
- *Training in short sessions* of both extension personnel (from forestry but also other departments) and villagers is an important element in the overall programme.
- Finally, but not least, should be mentioned the *flexibility built into the approach* used, which has contributed to an evolutionary process of stumbling, learning and readapting and made possible the shift from simple woodlots to village land management.

### 2.3.3. Constraints

Apart from the internal weaknesses mentioned above, there are a considerable number of broader constraints that cannot easily be influenced by a community forestry programme itself:

- The straying of livestock, especially in the dry season, is an important problem which is still almost impossible to resolve and makes protection of individually planted trees, woodlots and regeneration of natural vegetation very difficult. Communal woodlots were until recently protected by wire

netting, but this is very expensive and a non-sustainable solution. Research for alternatives has been carried out, but the planting of hedges is realistic only for very small plots such as vegetable gardens and village nurseries. Controlling animal behaviour through closer herding is another possibility to protect young trees planted, but it requires a high degree of village organization.

- Although new proposals have been prepared in Senegal and Burkina Faso, forest legislation is still inadequate and does not favour tree planting and village forest management; peasants are not offered the necessary guarantees to assured rights and benefits from trees planted and forest managed.
- There is a fundamental conflict of interest between the urban population (who want low prices for farm products) and farmers (who want fair prices reflecting cost of investment and production). In most countries in Africa the prices at farm-gate are too low and seldom invite farmers to undertake long term investments in land improvement. The influence of price structures and subsidies in the agricultural, livestock and forestry sectors has been greatly underestimated. The actual situation (high subsidies to the agricultural sector and low prices for wood products) does not favour private initiatives in tree planting, or management of natural vegetation while it enhances further expansion of agriculture, often on marginal lands.
- The installation of village nurseries still poses important problems, due to inaccessibility of water (indeed many villages have no access to drinking water in their immediate surroundings).
- The knowledge and experience of extension workers are often low, from both a pedagogic and a technical point of view. At the same time they have to function in a social environment which imposes its own constraints, and which are not always recognised by their superiors. It is often difficult for them to play their role as a facilitator in solving village problems. Furthermore, training within forestry schools remains very conventional and pays only limited attention to extension and rural development aspects.
- In most countries, but especially in Senegal, the local population are rarely involved in the official exploitation of forestry resources on their own lands. This activity is usually monopolised by mostly urban-based cooperatives and companies for charcoal-making, which causes feelings of frustration among the population and a loss of interest in the protection of these resources. Reforms in Senegal and elsewhere are aimed at involving people living around natural forest reserves in their management and the exploitation of tree products.
- Finally, there are problems related to the organisation of activities at all levels. Institutional collaboration is often ill-defined or non-existent, with poor coordination of interventions in the rural areas by government departments,

NGOs and projects.

### 3. Proposals for 'Village Land Management' approaches

#### 3.1. General

From the mid-1980s, growing concern within many forestry programmes, the failure of many agricultural development projects (often highly crop-specific such as cotton or peanuts) and the complex situation regarding range management have helped the development of the so-called 'Gestion du Terroir Villageois (GTV)' or Village Land Management (VLM) approach. This new approach is now strongly promoted, if not pushed, by important funding agencies such as the World Bank and the CCCE (Caisse Centrale de Cooperation Economique, France). Important amounts of funding (and conditions) are being used to re-orient agricultural development in the region. Programmes have been launched recently (1990/1991) not only in Burkina Faso, but also in Mali, Senegal and Niger. Although some experience has been gained in World Bank funded VLM-pilot projects and pilot activities undertaken by bilateral funded community forestry projects in Burkina and the cotton development project in Mali, it is too early to assess VLM effectiveness under field conditions. Below, we describe this concept of VLM and its implementation.

#### 3.2. Village Land Management/PNGT

The Village Land Management (VLM) approach, according to the World Bank supported 'National Programme for (village) Territory Management' ('Programme National de Gestion des Terroirs' or PNGT) in Burkina Faso, is a multisectoral, decentralised and participatory methodology, that uses the concept of a village territory, managed by a responsible village group with the objective of using the natural resources in such a way as to assure their sustainability (PNGT, 1991). The PNGT, which is being implemented and coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development aims to create the conditions for local planning of natural resources and to transfer responsibility for this to village communities. The following 7 steps are followed by the PNGT:

##### 1. Mobilising awareness

Analysis with villagers of causes and consequences of natural resource degradation; explanation of VLM objectives, approach, methods and the role of community, government and NGOs.

## 2. Diagnosis

Evaluation with the village population of their resources, needs, and problems: definition of village territory boundaries; study of the community's socio-economic aspects including different social groups, land tenure, community organisation, infrastructure; analysis of ecological conditions, natural resource inventory and corresponding property and usufruct rights; land evaluation, analysis of production and land conservation systems; summary diagnosis to be approved by the village community.

## 3. Social organisation of the community

Mobilising awareness on the need to organise in a consensual way, and the creation of village committees responsible for VLM.

## 4. Design of a VLM plan

On the basis of the above diagnosis, a VLM plan is drawn up for selected interventions, their objectives, expected effect and benefits and estimated costs. These interventions should normally be related to natural resources (land, water, vegetation). The VLM plan also involves the division of the village territory into distinct zones. It is designed with the agreement of villagers and also serves as a fund raising tool.

## 5. Establishing a management contract between community and government

The plan is established and discussed with the whole community in order to be sure that it is understood and accepted by the whole population. When adopted, the plan is presented to government for technical and financial support. If accepted by government, a contract is drawn up and signed by both parties. Funding of the plan has to come from community contributions, loans and grants.

## 6. Execution

The village community is supported by NGO's and government services to implement the VLM plan through training, extension and administrative, juridical and financial support.

## 7. Monitoring and evaluation

Major concerns are: project implementation and its impact on the village's natural resources; socio-economic consequences (effective village committees, representation of all social groups in these committees, awareness and involvement); establishment of village boundaries and zonal repartition of lands, etc.



The development of efficient local institutions is considered an essential condition for the success of this programme. The approach has been tested in 7 pilot projects in Burkina Faso since 1987 and has become operational on a larger scale since 1991.

### 3.3. Village Land Management and the Forest Services

As mentioned earlier, the VLM concept finds its origin in the community forestry programmes already implemented. As early as 1982, extension tools had already been developed for the forestry service in Burkina Faso, to sensitise rural populations on the need for overall management of their village territory (GRAAP: 'Etre Maître de son terroir'). In Senegal similar materials were to develop from 1986. The concept has been further enhanced by the setting up of a presidential advisory group in Burkina Faso, and has succeeded in drawing the interest of important funding institutions.

The VLM concept has been further elaborated (Kaboré, et al, 1987; PAFT/SENEGAL, 1990; MET/Burkina Faso, 1991) and tested (Bognetteau, E. et al, 1989) in projects implemented by the Forest Service. Strongly building on the participatory approach for community forestry, it emphasises the need to integrate forestry and tree related activities with other land use interventions in order to come to sustainable management of the village's natural resources. To better understand the concept of 'VLM' three important notions should be considered:

- a. The spatial organisation of the village territory, into small management units, that can be grouped in two distinct categories: a silvo-pastoral zone, with few agricultural activities, and an agro-silvo-pastoral zone, where agriculture is dominant.
- b. Dynamic management of natural resources given changing use of resources over time due to seasonal differences, potential for production, need for fallow periods, changes in tenure, etc.. Dynamic management is also based on the understanding that different activities (farming, animal husbandry, forestry) are often carried out by the same peasant. Where forestry is concerned, one can distinguish between two main interventions:
  - management of natural vegetation/forests in the silvo-pastoral zone;
  - agro-forestry systems mainly, but not exclusively, in the agro-silvo-pastoral zone.
- c. Involving the collective and individual responsibility of village people. To

a great extent, villagers have lost any feeling of responsibility for managing their natural resources. They are often in a state of uncertainty as to their rights to land and trees.

Feeling responsible for your land also means 'being master of your land' by assuming duties, having rights and the means of exercising that mastery. To be able to assume these responsibilities, the village must have:

- real powers and rights
- the necessary competence
- an economic interest
- the wish to play this responsible role; which will to a great extent depend on the previous three factors, as shown below in the diagram.

Basic conditions for the assumption of local responsibility by villagers



### 3.4. Factors influencing the effectiveness of the VLM approach

Strengths and weaknesses of the proposed VLM approach can only be discussed in relation to proposals in documents. Practical experience with this approach is still too recent and scarce to provide clear lessons.

#### 3.4.1. Strengths

- The attempt to tackle land use management with an inter-sectoral approach is very important, avoiding competition between different support services

(both government and non-government).

- Most of the lessons learned from earlier experiences in rural development and with community forestry have been incorporated into this new approach. The pedagogic tools developed by GRAAP will be used also in the PNGT programme in Burkina Faso.
- The entire village population is involved in this approach, a strong emphasis placed on enabling village people to take responsibility for natural resource management (legislation, etc.).

#### 3.4.2. Weaknesses

- There is a risk in not acknowledging the high variability in resource productivity in time and space under the particular conditions of the Sahel/Sudan zone. These dynamics argue against too rigid and fixed a zoning of land units.
- In spite of the expressed concern for village participation, the major concern of a donor agency such as the World Bank seems to be technocratic: fixing boundaries of individual village territories; establishing fixed zones within the village territory, and the establishment of village committees and contracts, promoted by the programme.
- The wish to establish rapidly village committees may be counter productive, as there is a risk that important parts of the village population feel that these committees have been imposed upon them or represent the interests of only part of the village population.
- Very little attention has been given to gender issues and the specific, sometimes conflicting interests of men and women.
- Too little attention has been paid to associate traditional village leaders (chiefs, religious, ...) who are often an important institution in decision making.
- Development and strengthening of community organisations is a long process and demands capacities that most government agencies do not possess. Experience elsewhere, even in India (Laban et al, 1991) has shown that this is not easy, even for highly professional NGO's working for a long time in the same area. Nevertheless it is indeed a very basic precondition for any sustainable development at the village level. The PNGT, and for that matter also the VLM approach of the Forest Services, gives very little insight how such community organisation, in terms of functional village groups, should be achieved.
- No attention has been given to the need to promote the creation of intermediary organisations, preferably by village populations themselves. Intermediary organisations at the supra-village level (grouping a reasonably

large number of villages (10 to 25) have to be conceived as organisations that have the confidence of both functional village groups and support organisations (government services and NGO's).

- An important question remains to what extent we can expect different institutions (government and non-government) to fully cooperate.

#### 4. Implications and prospects

##### 4.1. **Lessons still to be learned**

- Probably the most important false assumption has been that rural people in the Sahel consider environmental degradation and hence tree planting and protection as a priority activity. We have to realise that this is not so and that forestry, environmental issues, and land degradation are long term problems and have far less priority than drinking water, food, medicines, a bicycle or a radio. Too little attention is given to ensure direct benefits from activities encouraged by community forestry projects. Community forestry and Village Land Management programmes have to face this priority setting and to find ways to match long-term, often national objectives, with direct tangible benefits for farmers.
- Related is the incorrect assumption that marginal farmers can be asked to make long-term investments in tree planting and soil and water conservation without any subsidy, in situations where both their socio-economic and ecological resource base is very low. Indeed they have no capital assets available, while agricultural production levels are low. At the same time returns on forestry investments are insignificant due to very low wood prices. Further development of approaches should take these aspects into account and incorporate modalities for wise use of specific subsidies, especially when a farmer is asked to implement interventions that have a wider impact than his own farm alone.
- A focus on natural vegetation instead of only on tree planting would have been more relevant, as protection and management of natural vegetation is likely to have a much higher impact on environmental degradation and could contribute more significantly to lessen the gap between wood consumption and annual regrowth. In future programmes, much more emphasis therefore, needs to be given to local level management of natural forest resources.
- Too much emphasis has been given to the fuelwood role of trees. It should be recognised that, without ignoring existing and often serious fuelwood shortages, trees have multiple uses and programmes need to take into account

all these different uses in order to be effective.

- Although the role of women in forestry and village land management is now better understood, involvement of women and strengthening of women's group organisation should be given more emphasis. Experiences especially in Senegal have shown the effectiveness of promoting women's rights of access to land and thereby encouraging treeplanting.

#### 4.2. Issues for further development

Apart from the points raised above, there are five other issues that need attention:

1. As noted earlier, the organisation and strengthening of functional village groups should be given much more attention than it has received in the past. Experiences in other regions (Latin America and Asia) show that without such strengthening, development programmes rarely have sustainable impact. Literacy, functional education, awareness raising on their social and political situation, improving organisational and management skills and enhancing claim making capacities are important aspects of such strengthening. The mere establishment of village committees for village land management has to be considered as too simple and technocratic a measure, mainly designed to achieve donor driven objectives.
2. Government institutions rarely have the capacities to engage themselves in such long term processes of community organisation. In many cases NGO's have proved to be more apt to engage in such activities, not least by a more permanent presence and a stronger commitment to village people's interests. However, unlike in other regions, NGO's in Africa have rarely acquired the capacities to undertake on a large scale such development processes. There is probably an important need to encourage and to strengthen local NGOs to be better equipped for these crucial tasks.
3. Village land management programmes must take into account the land's ability to support different uses, its current condition, and the socio-economic resource base of the local community (including their property and usufruct rights). It is essential for the success of such programmes to acquire proper knowledge on these factors, since on them depend the type of desirable investment for stabilising land degradation or intensifying production.

4. Government policies need re-thinking to support local level management more effectively, by:
  - guarantees of property and/or usufruct rights to land and trees
  - proper marketing and price structures to enhance farmer/village investments in natural resource management
  - incentives to reduce initial investment costs through subsidies (if justified) or more accessible credit
  - providing knowledge and competence on appropriate technologies for land use related interventions.
5. Most activities are still in a preliminary phase. An important issue for the near future will be that of scaling-up the implementation from the level of pilot villages to larger programmes at provincial or even national levels. To what extent will it be possible to translate experience gained in staff-intensive pilot projects to staff-extensive large scale projects?

#### 4.3. Conclusion

One of the strong points that has characterised the community forestry approach so far is its ability to evolve. Already, many lessons have been incorporated into an approach that started with the establishment of communal woodlots and the raising of awareness on environmental degradation. Many of these lessons have contributed to the actual 'state of the art' of community forestry in francophone West Africa in which participatory concepts have matured and further elaborated and in which community forestry is now considered as one important component of Village Land Management.

It might be concluded here that the participatory community forestry approach has been highly instrumental in paving the way, by stumbling, learning and improving, to more integrated approaches of local level natural resource management that at the moment are translated in terms of Village Land Management. Village land management could be considered as one important objective of a community forestry programme. The latter often is a necessary phase preceding proper village land management, because of its emphasis on participatory approaches, awareness raising, extension of and training in 'new' technology. In future projects, community forestry and village land management should be considered as elements of the same process approach.

The flexibility of the community forestry approach, as it has been applied in Sahelian countries, has largely contributed to an evolutionary process from woodlots to village land management. Blue-print approaches do not work and

also the new generation of village land management programmes need to have sufficient space and time to evolve to perhaps even more appropriate concepts of adjusting external projects to the aspirations and priorities of village people.

Such long-term processes could be inspired by the Mali proverb that says: 'We are in a hurry, so we have to walk slowly'.

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**Dryland Networks Programme**

**INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

**3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD, England**

**Tel: (44-71) 388.2117 Fax: (44-71) 388.2826**

**Telex: 261681 EASCAN G**

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