Local development and community management of woodlands: Experience from Mali

Intercooperation

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARFP	(*Appui à la Recherche Forestière Participative*) Support for research into participatory forestry
CCC	(*Centre de Conseil Communal*) Centre providing support for rural councils
CRRAS	(*Centre Régional de Recherche Agronomique de Sikasso*) Sikasso regional centre for agronomic research
CRC	(C*adre Régional de Concertation*) Regional consultative group
DRCN	(*Direction Régionale de la Conservation de la Nature*) Regional office for the conservation of nature
EDP	(*Environnement et Développement Paysan*) Environment and farmer development
ESPGRN	(*Equipe Système de Production et Gestion des Ressources Naturelles*) Farming systems research programme
GDRN	(*Gestion Durable des Ressources Naturelles*) Sustainable natural resource management programme.
PAGS	(*Plan d'Aménagement et de Gestion Simplifié*) Simplified development and management plan
PRF	(*Programme Ressources Forestières*) Forestry resources programme
SCN	(*Service de Conservation de la Nature*) Nature conservation department
SDDR	(*Schéma Directeur du Développement Rural*) Master plan for land management and rural development
SLACAER	(*Service Local d'Appui Conseil à l'Aménagement et l'Equipement Rural*) Local department for rural development and infrastructure
SLRC	(*Service local de la Réglementation et du Contrôle*) Local regulatory and monitoring department
SRG	(*Structure Rurale de Gestion*) Rural management structure

INTRODUCTION

Southern Mali is an area of considerable agricultural potential, producing the entire national cotton output, a third of the country's millet and sorghum and two-thirds of its maize (Berthé *et al*. 1991). Over the last few years, natural resources in the region have come under considerable pressure from various quarters: major climatic changes that have resulted in poor and unevenly distributed rainfall; demographic changes triggering significant population growth and urban expansion; economic developments, such as the increasing importance of cash crops and replacement of subsistence agriculture by a monetary economy; technical advances that have made equipment and new tools and technologies more easily available and enabled farmers to make more productive use of their land; and the environmental degradation evident in declining soil fertility, degraded natural vegetation and diminishing forest reserves.

Rural and urban Malians alike continue to depend on forests and trees, using them in a variety of different but overlapping ways: as a source of fuel and food for the household; as fodder, bedding and fertiliser in agricultural production; and as a source of revenue and employment. Nationwide, wood is the main source of energy, but it is under increasing pressure as forest reserves dwindle and the population expands. Traditional natural resource management systems can no longer cope with the effects of the intensive commercial exploitation of firewood and other forest products, which is particularly prevalent around urban areas (Bellefontaine *et al*., 1997). Moreover, as the State raises levies on forest produce, and has asserted its ownership of forests, while the financial value of trees increases, there are few incentives for local people to protect these resources, as they have no responsibility for their management (Maïga, 1996).There is thus an urgent need to consider how best to satisfy the requirements of the growing population while maintaining the quality and quantity of the country's woodlands.

LEGISLATING FOR DECENTRALISED FOREST MANAGEMENT

The changing institutional context

In 1991 the military regime that had been in power for over two decades was overthrown, and subsequent changes in the country's major institutions prompted a shift towards resolving problems through consultation and dialogue. Following the 1991 National Conference, and in response to pressure from farmers, a national rural audit was organised in order thoroughly to review agricultural policy and start building a constructive relationship between the State and producers. On the basis of this critical dialogue, a master plan for land management and rural development (*le Schéma Directeur du Développement Rural* or SDDR) was drafted in March 1992, aimed at addressing the following issues:

- Promoting a global vision of rural development by moving away from a narrow sectoral approach;
- Re-orienting the role of the State and redefining the role of agencies involved in rural development;
- Decentralising state technical services and management decisions;
- Rationalising and reducing the level of state intervention in rural production by cutting the number of government technical services;
- Developing a decentralised rural development programme and promoting the sustainable management of natural resources;
- Involving and empowering rural producers and their local regulatory organisations;
- Recognising the role of private producers in promoting development and managing the public domain.

Recognising the political realities of the situation, and given the option to decentralise, the Ministry for the Environment and Rural Development (MDRE) drew up an action plan that aimed to incorporate the principles of the SDDR through various institutional and legislative reforms. This plan centred on restructuring the Department for Rural Development, and differentiating between state and public service operations in order to identify where power should be transferred to the private sector, local government or rural organisations.

Officially, access to and use of resources in sylvo-pastoral zones (comprising grazing and woodlands) are regulated by forestry laws. Having decided to revise the highly contentious forest code, the government initiated regional

and national level consultations in 1992 (DNEF, 1993); the new laws were signed at the end of 1995, and a campaign to explain them was launched in 1996, initially within the Forestry Service, and subsequently through meetings to inform local people about the most recent legislation.

The process of decentralisation

The new government also instigated a nationwide programme of decentralisation, which began in 1991, leading to the creation of over 700 *communes*[1] across Mali. In 1999, the first municipal elections were held and rural councils established, each with its own mayor. These councils were then made legally responsible for managing natural resources, and given the option to delegate the task to community forest management committees and liaise between communities wishing to manage a forest and the technical services responsible for helping them to do so. This prerogative is set out in decree No. 96-0484/P-RM, which lays down the conditions and means for making decentralised state services available to local governments (MDRI, 1999). The constitution and management of areas controlled by decentralised local governments are set out in Law 96-050 of current legislation on decentralisation, which defines the principles for the constitution and management of local government land, and transfers responsibility to local people. Article 11 of this law stipulates that local governments are responsible for managing, developing and conserving their estates, and for protecting the ecological balance of their land; while Article 14 states that local governments may delegate power to village authorities, interest groups and neighbourhoods that have an established rural management structure (MDRI, 1999).

One of the pre-conditions for devolving power in this way is the requirement for an approved management and development plan, to be implemented through management contracts between the council and registered village organisations. Community forests should be developed and managed within this framework, which is one of several entry points for managing the area under the council's jurisdiction. By making the committees at council level responsible for implementing the development and management plans, the strategic plans developed for community forests can be disseminated throughout the municipality as a whole, in the spirit of local development.

[1] *Communes rurales* are the lowest level of local government in Mali and are elected for a five year period. In this paper, they are referred to as rural councils.

Box 1. Summary of structures and management tools mentioned in this paper

Community forest
The community forest is a demarcated wooded area within council territory. The rural council is responsible for its management, and may delegate this task to one or a group of villages.

Village community
The village community represents inhabitants from the same village, who organise themselves around traditional village leaders and institutions.

Rural council
The smallest unit of decentralised local government, the rural council is governed by elected councillors.

Development plan
This sets out the rules and measures applicable to a wooded area over a given period of time, in order to achieve certain objectives determined by the ecological and socio-economic conditions in the area.

Management plan
This covers the technical and financial management, timing, and location of the different operations specified in the plan.

Development and management plan
This management tool integrates all the technical and financial aspects of operations planned for a particular area over a given period of time. It may be revised while the plan is being implemented.

Source of the last three plans: ONF, 1989

A NEW APPROACH TO MANAGING COMMUNITY FORESTS

The origins of the GDRN programme

The Swiss government has supported the forestry sector in Mali since 1981, mainly through institutional capacity building within the forestry service, reforestation activities and work to protect forests in the region of Sikasso, in southern Mali. These activities were reviewed in response to the major institutional and political developments engendered by the change in government in1991. It was felt that new approaches were needed to work with the increasingly dynamic farmers' movement, while the ongoing process of political and administrative decentralisation necessitated a redefinition of the role of the State. As a result, the sustainable natural resource management

programme (GDRN) was developed in 1995, with the Swiss agency Intercooperation responsible for its implementation.

The objective of the GDRN programme is to contribute to the sustainable management of natural resources in Mali, with a particular focus on developing village lands in the Third Region, in the southeast of the country. The objectives are to:

- Increase the capacity of village organisations and communities to develop and make economically productive use of natural resources, as a basis for promoting agro-sylvo-pastoral production systems;
- Develop participatory research methods based on respect for local knowledge and working methods;
- Establish a process for resolving problems by focusing on the needs, priorities, means and capacities of local people;
- Improve the capacity of public and private support institutions to serve local people.

The GDRN programme was launched in 1996. It is based on three components:

- EDP: a support programme for local environmental and farmer and herder organisations;
- PRF: support for participatory research through the forestry research programme of the agricultural research institute (IER);
- Support for decentralised forestry services through the regional Office for the Conservation of Nature (the DRCN[2]), and other partners such as ESPGRN (the farming systems research programme), as well as local consultancy firms.

The approach used by GDRN aims to enable the communities with which it works to take responsibility for managing the natural resources in their area, mobilising groups such as farmer and herder organisations, village communities, rural councils, and public and private institutions for rural development. In 1998, strategic analysis conducted by the Regional

[2] Most employees of the former forestry service (*Eaux et Forêts*) now work for the DRCN, a department created in 1999.

Consultative Group (the CRC)[3] and an assessment of the initial results of project activities revealed a number of gaps in the operational strategies of the GDRN programme (see Box 2). It became clear that more work needed to be done on certain priority themes, such as managing classified forests and agro-sylvo-pastoral village areas, developing local conventions for managing natural resources, and supplying private tree nurseries with seeds and good quality planting material (GDRN, 1999 and 2000).

Joining forces to develop a new approach

Recognising that the variety of skills needed to address these complex management issues called for the involvement of different structures and resource people, GDRN set up three multi-disciplinary working groups. They receive technical and financial support from Intercooperation, and aim to create realistic operational strategies, in particular to develop and manage community forests.

This group started life as the village forestry group from Déh-Sougoula, evolving into the "community forest working group" with the advent of decentralisation.[4] Its members spent two years developing a methodological approach that would support the development and shared management of community forests. This new approach is fully endorsed by the programme's institutional partners, whose close involvement in its development also provided insights that have informed and enhanced their other interventions. Programme activities to support community forests are now demand-led, based on requests for assistance from local people, which are assessed at monthly meetings attended by all institutional partners. These meetings are also used to review the methodological approach, analytical tools, roles and responsibilities of local structures, and the programme of activities in participating villages.

[3] The CRC brings together all the agencies, projects and organisations involved in natural resource management in southern Mali. It was set up in 1995 by ESPGRN, which still organises CRC meetings, and receives financial support from GDRN. The CRC provides a multi-institutional forum for information, sharing experiences and analysing various themes, and supports activities aimed at furthering the sustainable management of natural resources.

[4] The other two working groups focus on the privatisation of tree nurseries and local conventions for natural resource management.

Box 2. Early experiences in the village of Déh

During the course of its activities in Déh, a village 41 km from Sikasso, the community forest working group came up against various problems that were to provide valuable lessons in understanding the process of developing and managing community forests. To start with, villagers did not see the development of the forest as a priority, and they expected to be rewarded for participating in the surveys conducted by the working group. After the working group ran a concerted awareness-raising campaign that helped improve relations and trust with the villagers, they were able to move on, and a committee was set up to manage the forest, draw up a local agreement and identify a site for selling firewood. Villagers also requested training in cutting techniques for their woodcutters, and produced twenty or so hatchets to use in the forest. However, just when the working group thought that the new regime was about to be implemented, the village chief moved in and effectively blocked any further collaboration with local people.

With hindsight, it seems that this was partly due to the fact that the slow pace of the approach failed to meet the villagers' high expectations, and that underlying tensions in the village had not been addressed by any accompanying activities. The rather technical approach used in Déh was not appropriate to the circumstances, and instead of enabling local people to participate in managing their resources, it actually constituted another constraint in a situation already complicated by social dissension, ethnic diversity and various conflicts of interests. The main lesson to be learned from this experience is that interventions should be led by demand from the community, rather than imposed from outside. As a result, the working group subsequently developed an approach that took account of the real constraints faced by different groups that then enabled all parties concerned to become more involved in developing and managing community forests.

SIMPLIFIED DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT PLANS

Devising simplified development and management plans

The community forest working group brought together the major stakeholders involved in natural resource management, and proceeded to design an approach that would facilitate the participatory development and management of community forests. The approach can be broken down into several main stages:

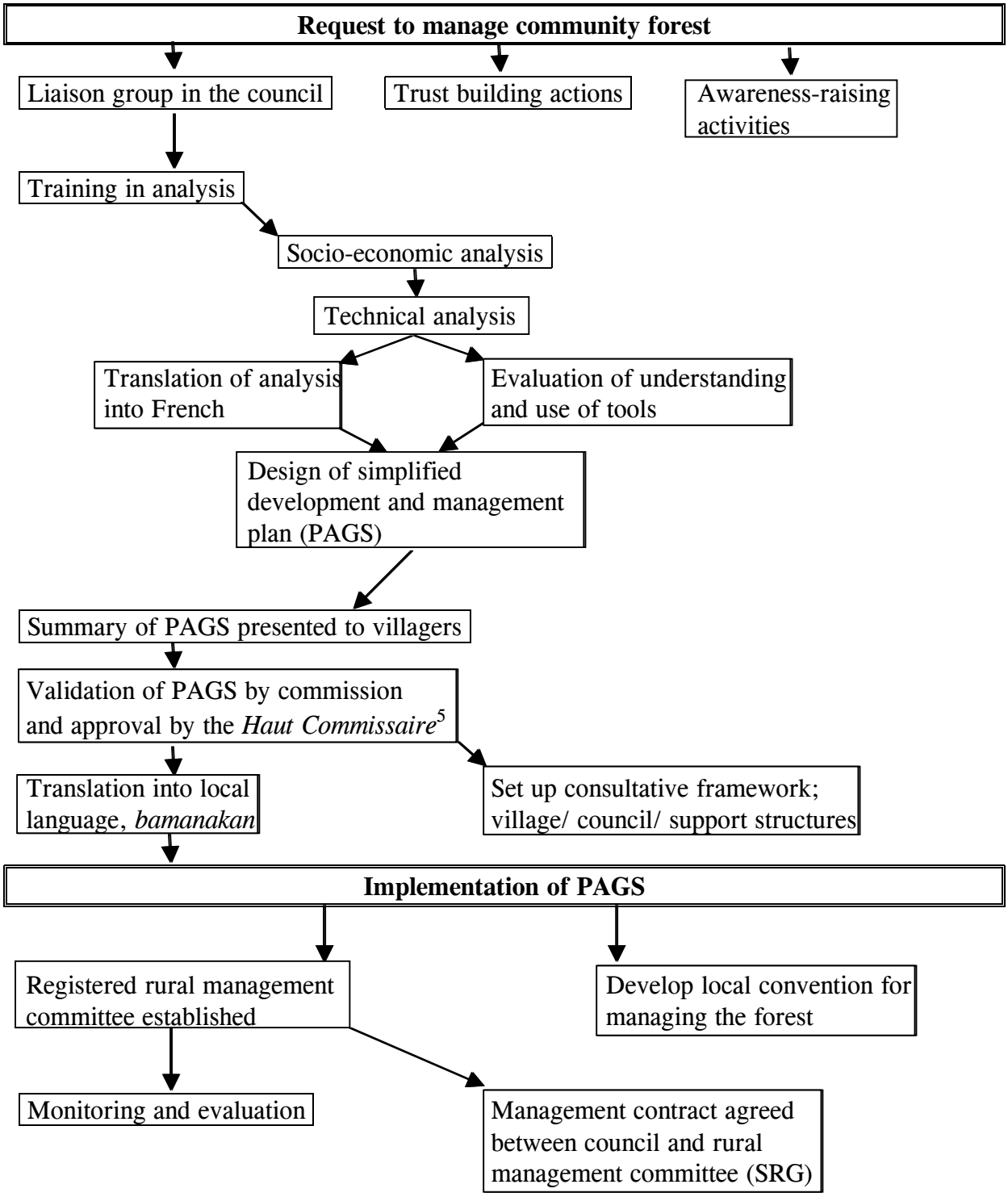
- Intermediary village or council groups request support in managing a wooded area;
- Technical and socio-economic diagnostic tools are made available to these groups, and members trained to use them so that they can evaluate the potential of the areas concerned;

- Technical services draft a simplified development and management plan, or PAGS (*Plan d'Aménagement et de Gestion Simplifié*), based on information collected by rural communities;
- A committee, composed of representatives from the village, the council and government support structures, is set up to implement the PAGS;
- A management agreement is developed for monitoring and evaluating all stages and activities of the programme.

This approach integrates the progressive transfer of state lands and authority to decentralised local governments, such as rural councils and district councils, while allowing village communities, which have no legal status, to maintain some control over the management of community forests. The various bodies involved in the process include foresters from the regional Office for the Conservation of Nature (the DRCN) and its devolved structures, private service providers, rural councils and village communities. State services are responsible for implementing certain activities, while some are shared with or transferred to other agencies, and others assigned to farmer organisations.

The successive stages of this approach are presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Programme approach to developing and managing community forests



[5] The *Haut Commissaire*, formally known at the governor, is the government representative at regional level.

Stages of the approach

Application for assistance in managing a forest

The community forest working group only intervenes in a village if it has received a written or verbal request for support in managing a forest. As part of the ongoing process of decentralisation, this request must be submitted to the council, which then sends its land committee to survey the site and advises the mayor on its findings. If the response is favourable, the mayor writes to the GDRN programme asking for support in developing the forest, specifying the site and village involved.

Information and awareness-raising in villages

Awareness raising campaigns in participating villages are conducted through theatre presentations. Each session deals with the problems affecting community forests, touching on the causes and consequences, problems and constraints, solutions and obstacles to their implementation, and the necessity for all groups to participate in the process. These sessions are also used to inform local people about related issues, and they then select male and female representatives as local intermediaries. These representatives attend training courses, which are timetabled by common agreement.

Designing tools for analysis

The various structures involved in the programme used a mixture of local and external sources of information to design adapted tools to enable local people to collect technical and socio-economic information (Guèye and Schoonmaker, 1991; PRF, 1997). The tools for socio-economic analysis were developed by the Farming Systems Research team (ESPGRN), and those for technical analysis by the Forest Resources Programme (PRF) at the Centre for Agronomic Research in Sikasso (CRRAS). They were then presented to the community forest working group, assessed according to certain criteria, and amended as necessary. The criteria used to judge the tools focused on:

- accessibility: the tools should be simple, understandable and easily used by local representatives;
- pertinence: the information collected must be relevant to subsequent stages of the process;
- duration: the tools should not take up much of the interviewers' time.

Fine-tuning the tools and training sessions

Once the tools were finalised and translated into one of the national languages, *bamanakan*, the working group organised training sessions for local representatives and staff from the DRCN. Eighteen community forest management committees participated in these workshops, which were held in each of the four districts covered by the GDRN programme. Participants had to amend the tools so that they could be endorsed and adopted by farmers, and after the first one-day workshop, each management committee was given a month to return to their village, estimate the potential of its wooded area and evaluate the use of the tools in the field. As only 17% of participants were considered to have mastered them, the tools were again simplified on the basis of feedback from local people. A second workshop was organised in response to farmers' proposals, followed by another evaluation of the extent to which participants had assimilated the tools. Seven of the twenty-one participating management committees were found to have a good grasp of them, while the others, whose levels of understanding varied, were then supported by staff from the DRCN. This enabled all the management committees to survey their community forests, assess the socio-economic conditions in their villages, and use their findings to draft PAGS for their forests.

Socio-economic analysis

Socio-economic analysis can provide useful information about a village, its resources, the people using those resources, and the constraints that they face. It can be used to build up a picture of the village and identify the reasons why applicants have selected a particular forest, to trace land tenure and the history of land use and occupation, and to sketch and analyse a map and land use plan for the forest.

The map and land use plan is analysed in two stages. In the first, the different types of soil and vegetation found in the area are identified, and their characteristics, use, main users and constraints recorded. Participants also look at the relationships between neighbouring villages and the forest, specifying the type of link, the categories of soil and vegetation involved, and the constraints. The second stage deals with forest products, existing regulations and village organisations related to the forest; its potential, constraints and their solutions. As part of the new approach, trust-building activities are carried out in tandem with the initial analysis (see Box 3 below).

Box 3. Village mapping in the community forest of Kouri

As one of the first steps in evaluating resources in their community forest, local people were asked to define the forest boundaries and map out the different types of soil and vegetation found within them. The management committee in Kouri began by using natural landmarks, such as a waterhole at the north western edge, rocky outcrops on the Yorosso road and the point where it crosses another road, then linking them up to produce a fuller map. They used their knowledge of the terrain to mark out the various soil types found in the area, and then completed the process by sketching in vegetation.

The committee and SCN technical staff developing the PAGS used this map as the basis for all subsequent discussions about the community forest. In addition to providing a visual representation of the forest, it also showed the distribution and use of different soil types, and presented a hydrographic picture of the area. Technical staff used it as the basis for mapping the forest on a scale of 1/50 000.

Technical analysis

While the socio-economic tools are used for qualitative analysis of the forest, the technical tools enable participants to make a quantitative analysis of forest resources and related activities. The levels at which the exploitation of wood for fuel, building and other uses will remain sustainable can be gauged by combining estimates of the various woody species found in selected areas with an assessment of their productive and regenerative capacity on the different types of soil and vegetation identified earlier. It is important to use units of measurement that can be understood by each participant, so the most common units include cartloads, bundles, sticks, trunks, etc. Information is also needed about the degree of vegetative cover in an area, approximate tree to shrub ratios, a detailed inventory of woody species currently and previously found in the area, and the herbaceous ground cover in the forest.

Developing a template for simplified development and management plans (PAGS)

The objectives set by local groups wishing to develop a community forest take account of a number of ecological, economic, financial and social factors, and are for the most part shaped by cultural and ecological considerations. In order to provide local actors with an easily understandable and practicable working document, the PAGS are a highly simplified version of the model proposed at national level (DNCN, 1999). This simplified template was drafted by the regional Office for the Conservation of Nature (DRCN), and then reviewed before being adopted by the community forest working group. Each

community forest plan is fine-tuned to meet the local requirements identified by forest users during their socio-economic and technical analysis of the area.

The PAGS provide a reference point for the rural councils and village committees responsible for managing wooded areas, as a two-pronged plan focusing on:

- Development - with the objective of achieving some kind of ecological balance in the area over a five-to ten year period, taking account of the economic, social and cultural roles of the forest;
- Management - covering the technical and financial aspects of programme activities, and providing a timetable and geographical presentation of the operational plan and associated costs.

Members of the working group are responsible for training agents involved in designing the PAGS, especially staff from the DRCN and departmental heads in the four districts covered by the programme. Particular emphasis is placed on using forest management committees to involve local people in setting objectives and programming activities, and on their active participation in developing the forests.

Developing the PAGS

Once the socio-economic and technical analysis is finished, responsibility for developing the PAGS passes to the DRCN and members of the village management committee, who are assisted by district-level GDRN staff. The group in charge of drafting the five-year development plan addresses the main objectives and socio-economic issues related to the forest, and identifies all activities to be implemented during the programme, while government staff provide support and advice on the technical concepts used in the document.

The forest is divided into different sections, according to the characteristics of the soil and vegetation recorded on the maps. Each section is composed of a group of plots, which are not necessarily contiguous, and is allocated an objective and a programme of treatment. The primary focus of most plans for community forests around sacred woodlands is on protection. As sacred woodlands are often surrounded by degraded land, these sections of forest generally require either complete protection or protection plus restoration.

Box 4. The PAGS for the village forest of Diarakongo

The objective of the development plan for this 19-hectare forest, which was created in 1988, is to improve vegetative cover and effectively protect the habitat of the hallowed cayman living in the sacred wood attached to the village. This will involve opening up and maintaining a fire-break around the sacred wood, monitoring the forest, installing a stone cordon to control erosion and continuing the restoration of denuded areas begun by a team from the forestry research programme. Forest users also hope to be able to harvest more fruits and other non-timber forest products, and better develop the site.

It is estimated that the five-year programme will cost 2,202,000 F CFA[6]. This figure includes 1,272,000 F CFA in labour provided by local people, which leaves a further funding requirement of 930,000 F CFA.

Presenting a summary of the PAGS to the village

Once the development and management plan has been drafted, members of the forest management committee and the agents involved in the process report back to villagers at a general meeting, to which the land commission of the rural council is also invited. The content of the plan is explained, and participants are invited to comment. Their observations are taken into account by the committee responsible for writing up the next draft, which is sent for further comment to the DRCN.

Official endorsement of the PAGS

The PAGS then has to be endorsed by the "Technical Committee", a body set up by the *Haut Commissaire*, which is composed of representatives from the *Haute Commission*, the DRCN, the GDRN programme and mayors. After meeting to discuss the plan, they pass on their comments to the DRCN, which is responsible for finalising the plan. The final draft of the PAGS then has to be approved by the *Haute Commission,* in accordance with Article 47 of Law 95-004 governing natural resource management.

Implementing the PAGS

Once the PAGS has been endorsed by the "Technical Committee" and approved by the *Haute Commission*, a consultative committee is set up at the level of the rural council, to share its contents and talk to project partners about the implications of its implementation. When the programme of

[6] Equivalent to US$ 3,000 in December 2001.

activities has been finalised, the rural council can ask government representatives to make the relevant technical services available, or to recruit a technician to provide advice and support.

The development of community forests is part of a broader initiative to improve commonly used natural resources and encourage villages around these forests to assume responsibility for their upkeep. Although villages have no legal status, and the State has delegated the management of forests to the rural council, villagers are still keen to take responsibility for and become involved in managing their land in a way that will benefit their community.

When the consultative committee first met, it invited various groups that could help disseminate information about the process, such as the community forest management committee, technical services and socio-professional groups linked to community forests, forest users, village leaders, the rural council or its land commission, and local radio stations. The technical services were represented by the DRCN and its sub-branch, the local regulatory and monitoring department (SLRC) and the local support service for rural development and amenities (SLACAER), both sections of the Ministry of Rural Development, the administration, a representative from the cotton development organisation (CMDT) and the community forest working group. A moderator was also present at this meeting.

The consultative committee addressed two key questions at its first meeting:

- How should the forest management committee and rural council interact?
- Which complementary activities should be carried out parallel to the programme, to help all the different actors fully to play their role?

The following points were also discussed:

- Summary of the GDRN programme approach to developing and managing community forests, presented by the forest management committee and members of the community forest working group;
- Presentation of the development plan by the forest management committee and Nature Conservation service (SCN);
- Presentation of the tax system for rural firewood markets by the community forest working group;
- Presentation by the rural council, summarising its role in the development of community forests;
- Timetable for implementing the PAGS and integrating it into the council land use management plan, and identification of responsibilities and complementary activities.

After two years working with this approach, the consultative committees now constitute a working group for the tenure and land commission of the rural council. They act as a forum for information and exchange, enabling those involved in developing community forests fully to engage in the decentralised management of local government land. The use of PAGS can thus be dovetailed into the process of decentralisation, and could be extended to cover all council lands.

Rural management structures or SRG (Structure Rurale de Gestion)

At the moment, the land covered by PAGS is still owned by the State, which must approve the plans before they can be implemented. In future, when these lands are transferred to the rural council, the law will require the management committee to register as a recognised rural management structure. This will enable the committee to sign a contract with the council, which may be linked to a management agreement for the forest, aimed at producing concrete results that will benefit all local people concerned. This procedure guarantees villagers usufruct rights to resources that they have often already managed for generations.

Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the PAGS

Activities should be regularly monitored and evaluated by local people and support structures, to highlight any difficulties that may arise during the course of the programme. The terms of reference for monitoring and evaluating programme activities are drafted by the rural council, which may then delegate joint responsibility for the task to the state services and village community. Local people should ensure that they can do this effectively, and the consultative committee may meet as part of the monitoring process, which is designed to involve as many stakeholders as possible.

A system of mapping tools from aerial photos has been developed to enable local people to monitor improvements to community forests. Management committees are trained to interpret aerial photos, which are used to bring an element of precision into the monitoring and evaluation process, acting as an interface between the maps drawn by farmers and classic mapping. These photos are scanned to a scale of between 50% and 100%, depending on the size of the forest. Bearing in mind the activities undertaken as part of the PAGS, local people identify monitoring indicators and then add them to the map of the forest; usually using the herbaceous and woody species whose

presence or absence is seen as an indicator of the state of the soils or the economic potential of the forest. Using the landmarks on the sketch, the areas being evaluated are matched up with the scanned photo, and a monitoring form in the local language is developed to assess the different indicators.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Initial results

The community forest working group is currently active in twenty villages, which are spread across eighteen rural council areas in the four districts covered by the GDRN programme. At the time of writing, eighteen development and management plans and three management agreements have been drafted, ten plans are already being implemented, four plans have been officially approved in the course of a workshop, and eight consultative committees have been created.

In the year 2000, programme costs for the twenty forests came to 400,000 F CFA[7] per forest. They are expected to go down in the future, as greater familiarity with the process should mean that activities will not have to be repeated. In 2001, local officials based in the four districts have taken responsibility for dealing with new applications, as well as teaching people how to use the tools for socio-economic and technical analysis.

As commons, community forests are a potential source of both conflict and collective benefit, and their resources require shared management. The GDRN programme provides the community with tools that enable the various stakeholders to learn about negotiation and management, not only between different categories of users, but also between the councils, recently charged with managing the forest, and the management committee that may be made responsible for implementing the PAGS.

[7] Equivalent to US$ 550 in December 2001.

Box 5. Consultative committee meeting for the community forest of N'Gana

In December 2000, the village of Kignan hosted a meeting to discuss the community forest of N'Gana. This was a important opportunity to clarify the objectives and define the roles and responsibilities of the various actors involved in developing and managing the forest. Attended by representatives from support structures, the rural council, the government, local radio stations and farmer organisations, this event provided some valuable insights into the relationships between the different actors involved. Initially, the village chief and members of the village management committee for the N'Gana community forest seemed to be on their guard, as various misunderstandings had made people reluctant to participate in the joint development of their forest. It transpired that lack of consultation over the exploitation of firewood in the forest had caused friction between the villages of N'Gana and Kignan, and people were now questioning whether the forest actually belonged the rural council or the village. They also wanted to know who would profit from the income that could be earned from the forest.

The mayor gave a presentation on the role of the rural council in managing the forest, also covering the relationship between the rural council and the forest management committee. The ensuing discussion helped turn the meeting around, dispelling the suspicions that had been voiced earlier in the proceedings; and by the end of the day, members of the village committee were satisfied that the council authorities were involved as partners, and were not out to expropriate the forest. The rural council made an undertaking to support the management committee in finding sources of funding, monitoring activities and disseminating information, as well as enforcing current legislation and making provision in the municipal budget for developing the forest.

Encouraging women to participate in the process

Bearing in mind the fact that the PAGS are supposed to reflect the expectations of everyone involved with the forest, and having noted that all the local representatives attending training sessions were men, it was recommended that at least two women should join the management committee. Despite the fact that the majority of forest users are female, women had previously not been invited to join the management committee (see Box 6).

This recommendation became part of the GDRN programme gender strategy, supporting the representation of women on decision making bodies in rural community organisations and decentralised political structures, in order to increase their influence within civil society (Ogier, 2000).

Box 6. Setting up a grain mill as a means of involving women in managing the community forest of Kafono

The idea of setting up a grain mill grew out of a meeting with the Kafono women's association to discuss their perceptions of the rules governing the management of the community forest. Members of the association reported that, while they had been informed of the decision to create a community forest, they had not been involved in discussing and developing the rules for managing it. Having been excluded from the process and confronted with a *fait accompli*, they felt that they had little hope of being involved in managing the forest, and were worried that they would no longer be able to gather firewood there. They also reported that they had been wanting access to a grain mill for a long time.

In their analysis of the situation, the GDRN programme team concluded that the poor organisational structure of the women's association had prevented its members from playing an active role in making decisions about the management of the community forest. Setting up a grain mill was seen as an activity that would motivate the women, and provide the central plank of a support system that would include training in literacy and management. It was also thought that having a common goal would help to pull the group together. Nine women received training, and they also participated in an exchange visit with a well-organised women's association that had derived considerable benefits from managing a mill. Through their participation in the community forest management committee, two of these women also attended technical training sessions on forest management, and now represent their group at external meetings.

Roles and responsibilities

Various agencies are responsible for implementing different stages of the GDRN programme. Some operations are the responsibility of the state services, such as the DRCN and its decentralised structures or the administration, other activities may be wholly transferred to or shared with other bodies, and some are executed by rural councils, village communities or private service providers. The current division of roles and responsibilities is illustrated in Table 1 below.

Perspectives

The council acts as an interface between communities wishing to manage a forest and the technical services that will help them do so, and may itself require periodic assistance, as elected rural councillors often need advice and support in drafting plans to develop and manage common property resources.

The management of a community forest can also provide a useful 'pilot' experience in building relations between villages and councils. Work in a clearly identified arena, such as a forest, can help unite communities, as in the municipality of Diou, for example, where the management of the forest provided a starting point for developing a local land management plan for natural resources.

The implementation of these development and management plans is financed through regional and local development taxes, the national budget and development partners. The national agency responsible for investment in local government is another source of funding, and councils also benefit from assistance from the CCCs (*Centre de Conseil Communal*), centres that support rural councils, which were set up in each District to help councils develop a skill base and enable elected representatives to find the service providers best suited to their needs.

Applications to develop community forests may now be made by councils, as well as villages. Once land has been transferred to them, Article 54 of Law 95-004 grants decentralised local governments the power to endorse development and management plans. However, for this to be possible, land has to be transferred from central government to the rural councils, requiring the implementation of Law 96-050, which sets out the principles for the creation and management of lands to be attributed to the rural council.

Although natural resources should be the councils' main assets, legally they are still owned and managed by the State. Since the implementation of decentralisation, the Ministry for Rural Development has reviewed the transfer of eight functions from the State to local authorities, but has not fully taken account of the importance of transferring legal title to land to rural councils[8]. It is important to speed up the allocation of land to councils, so that they can assume the responsibility and legal authority to manage it. This needs to be done quickly for several reasons, as there is a risk that natural resources will become degraded or be over-exploited, either by outsiders accorded rights of use by the State, or by local people competing with users from outside the area.

[8] The Ministère de l'Equipement, de l'Aménagement du Territoire, de l'Environnement et de l'Urbanisme (MEATEU) has announced that this transfer will be postponed to 31-12-2002.

Table 1. Division of roles and responsibilities

Stage	Activities implemented by state services	Transferable/shareable activities	Activities implemented by local people
1 Awareness raising	Information	Information	
2 Expressing an interest			Application for support in developing the forest
3 Socio-economic & technical analysis		Training in analysis	Socio-economic analysis Technical analysis
4 Drafting the PAGS		Drafting a development plan	
5 Presenting the PAGS		Writing a simplified management plan	Commenting on summary and suggesting amendments
6 Validating the PAGS	- Hold workshop prior to endorsement by commission; - Commission submits PAGS for approval by the *Haut Commissaire*		
7 Implementing the PAGS		Setting up village/council consultative committee and seeking funding	Setting up village/council consultative committee and seeking funding
8 Preparing contracts			Drawing up management agreement and rural management structure
9 Monitoring and evaluation	Monitoring and evaluation	Monitoring and evaluation	Monitoring and evaluation

The approach developed by the community forest working group, with support from the GDRN programme, has been disseminated at national level. A manual outlining the methodology for developing community forests, aimed at elected rural councillors and management committees, is being prepared, and will be used as the basis for future training.

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