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Implementing decentralisation in Mali:

The experiences of two
rural municipalities in
southern Mali

**Amadi Coulibaly
and Thea Hilhorst**

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About the authors

Amadi Coulibaly is a forester specialising in rural development. In April 1997, after 11 years (1986 – 1997) of working in rural agronomical research, he joined the Swiss Intercooperation Foundation's Sustainable Management of Natural Resources Programme in Sikasso. He is currently in charge of work on the theme "Local Governance and Natural Resource Management" and at the regional coordination of the Jekasy programme in Sikasso for "Support for the Development of Natural Resources".

Amadi Coulibaly, Chargé Thématique Gouvernance Locale et GRN, Yekasi, BP 215, Sikasso, Mali.

Tel: +223- 620364/621123; fax:+223-620247; e-mail: ctjekasy@icsahel.org

Thea Hilhorst

The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) is an independent centre of knowledge and expertise in the areas of international and intercultural cooperation. The aims of KIT are to contribute to sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and cultural preservation and exchange. Thea Hilhorst is involved in research, publishing and networking on rural decentralisation and local governance in West Africa.

Thea Hilhorst, Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), BP 95001, 1090 HA Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Tel: +31-20-5688501; e-mail: t.hilhorst@kit.nl

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Acronyms

ADEMA-PASJ	<i>Alliance pour la Démocratie au Mali – Parti Africain pour la Solidarité et la Justice</i> Association for Democracy in Mali – African Party for Solidarity and Justice
ANICT	<i>Agence Nationale d’Investissement des Collectivités Territoriales</i> National Agency for Investment in Local Government
ASACO	<i>Association de Santé Communautaire</i> Community Health Association
CCC	<i>Centre de Conseil Communal</i> Municipal Advisory Centre
CCN	<i>Cellule de Coordination Nationale</i> National Unit for the Co-ordination of Local Government
CMDT	<i>Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement des Textiles</i> National Textile Development Corporation
CSCOM	<i>Centre de Santé Communautaire</i> Community Health Centre
DNCT	<i>Direction Nationale des Collectivités Territoriales</i> National Agency for Local Government
FIL	<i>Fonds d’Investissement Local</i> Local Investment Subsidies
HCCT	<i>Haut Conseil des Collectivités Territoriales</i> High Council of Local Government
MDD	<i>Mission de la Décentralisation et Déconcentration</i> Office of Decentralisation and Devolution
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NRM	Natural Resource Management
PDESC	<i>Plan de Développement Economique et Socio-Culturel</i> Economic and Socio-Cultural Development Plan
PIDS	<i>Parti pour l’Intégration et le Développement Social</i> Party for Integration and Social Development
RPM	<i>Rassemblement du Peuple Malien</i> Malian People’s Party
TDRL	<i>Taxe de Développement Régional et Local</i> Regional and Local Development Tax
UDD	<i>Union pour la Démocratie et le Développement</i> Union for Democracy and Development
VA	Village Association

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1. Introduction

Decentralisation became a reality in rural Mali in 1999, when years of political negotiation, work designing and formulating a legal and institutional framework and nationwide preparation culminated in municipal elections across the country. This institutional reform will still be in its early stages when the municipal councils complete their first term in 2004. The process of devolution has enormous potential for Mali and the entire sub-region, but replacing administrators with decentralised local governments invested with a range of legal powers also presents huge challenges at every level.

Having been legitimised by popular ballot, the municipal and town councils, taking their place alongside other key local actors responsible for territorial management and local governance, need to collaborate closely with other stakeholders in appropriating and managing local development. The introduction of rural municipalities also raises concerns for villages as they have no administrative status: what kind of partnerships and interactions will decentralised local governments develop with village authorities and civil society organisations as they mobilise the human, financial and material resources needed to get themselves up and running? And given the low levels of literacy in rural areas, what is the best way of helping them take over the task of managing the administration of local governments from government officials?

The aim of this study is to document and analyse the evolution of rural decentralisation since 1999. Through the experience of two rural municipalities in southern Mali, it will attempt to analyse the ways in which pre-existing local dynamics influenced the creation of municipalities, the election and start of municipal councils, and their capacity to act. After outlining the research methodology, this paper gives an overview of decentralisation in Mali, and a description of the two municipalities studied and the inauguration of their municipal councils. It then assesses how the municipalities' origins and social capital have affected their internal dynamics and achievements, and concludes by considering the ways in which decentralisation can be made to work for the benefit of rural people.

2. Methodology

This study focuses on two rural municipalities: Kouoro, which comprises six villages in the district of Sikasso; and Yognogo, which consists of three villages in the district of Koutiala. Selection criteria for the study included social cohesion (on the basis of indicators such as a tradition of collaboration, the extent to which Village Associations (VAs) had fragmented, the influence of customary authorities over the list of candidates), as well as the size of the municipality, its ethnic composition, the accessibility of the municipal council and willingness to participate in this research.

Conducted over several years, the main theme of this study is the dynamics of decentralisation implementation in Mali. Research began in 1999 when the municipal authorities were first established, and recommenced in 2002 after they had been functioning for several years. The first stage (1999) consisted of a series of group and individual interviews with the municipal council, village authorities, VA officials and local people. These were conducted in the context of work on a thesis that also looked at issues related to natural resource management (NRM) and land management (Coulibaly, 2000). The second phase of data collection was less intense, consisting of further interviews with mayors, municipal councillors, various village chiefs and leaders of socio-professional groups (herders in Kouoro, the inter-village land management group *Usignon*). The first author maintained regular contact with the two municipalities in the context of his work, and in 2002 a research assistant re-interviewed participants in the 1999 survey.

3. Historical background to decentralisation in Mali

When the colonial forces entered the regions of present-day Mali in 1883 they introduced a centralised territorial administration modelled on the French system. The first initiatives to decentralise administrative management of the country came during the colonial period, with the creation of the municipalities of Kayes and Bamako in 1918, and eleven other municipalities between 1953 and 1958. However, these first local governments represented local administrative areas; they were not endowed with any real powers or resources, nor did they provide local people with the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes (Sy et al., 1998).

When it achieved independence in 1960, the post-colonial State followed the example set by its colonial predecessors, adopting the same authoritarian attitude towards its citizens. In 1968 this regime was overthrown by a group of young army officers that seized power and established the Second Republic. Reform of the regional and local administration in 1977 resulted in the creation of the District of Bamako, which consisted of six municipalities, and the provision of planning bodies that theoretically provided local people with the opportunity to participate in the administration of the district. However, despite the introduction of these district councils and regional and local development committees, the military regime proved reluctant to relinquish its prerogatives and change the system. Although the government claimed to be encouraging political openness and democratisation, it failed to deliver any effective policies and the regime crumbled on 26 March 1991 following an uprising that led to the imprisonment of its leading political and military officials.

The transitional government at the head of Third Republic quickly set about laying the foundations for a process of democratisation. At a national conference held in 1991, work began on a new constitution instituting a State subject to the rule of law and introducing multiparty democracy. This constitution also recognised the basic principles of decentralisation, which soon proved to be also one of the few ways in which the transitional authorities could establish meaningful negotiations to end the rebellion raging in the north of the country.

Presidential and parliamentary elections were held in 1992, and in 1993 the Office of Decentralisation and Devolution (MDD) was created by decree to help the government reform decentralisation and prepare for its implementation. In 1996, as part of a nationwide initiative, the MDD facilitated the setting out of the administrative boundaries of 701 municipalities in consultation with the population,¹ of which 684 were rural municipalities and 19 urban municipalities. Municipal councils were put in place across the country following municipal elections held on 2 May and 6 June 1999.

Local governments and their powers

The new system of administrative organisation in Mali consists of three levels of local government: regional, district and municipal. There is no hierarchical relationship between these three entities. Municipalities are composed of several villages and/or groupings or neighbourhoods, and are managed by a council whose size varies according to the population of the municipality.² This council elects the mayor, who occupies the municipal office for five years along with his or her deputies. Each municipality selects representatives to sit on the indirectly elected district council, which is responsible for managing the district. Regional assemblies are elected from the district councils.

Municipalities are supervised by prefects, whose duties include ensuring that municipal proceedings conform to government legislation and endorsing municipal development plans, which require prefectural approval to release state funding for their proposed investments. The administration and other state technical services support and advise municipal councils according to their competences and opportunities. Because their capacity to deliver support and advice is limited by low levels of education in rural areas, the State and its development partners have designed a national programme to support local governments. The CCN (National Unit for the Co-ordination of Local Governments) was created to deliver technical assistance, and the ANICT (National Agency for Investment in Local Government) set up to provide them with financial support.

1. In 2001 two new municipalities were added to the 701 created in 1996.

2. Law N° 95-034 of 12th April 1995, setting out the code for local governments in the Republic of Mali, was modified by Law N° 98-010 on 15th June 1998. This states that municipal councils in municipalities with less than 10,000 inhabitants should have eleven members.

In 2000 the State established the first CCCs (Municipal Advisory Centres) to underpin the technical support system for local governments. It receives substantial backing from donors for this initiative: the French Development Agency funds CCC managers in the region of Sikasso, and has selected a consultancy firm for each district on the basis of tenders submitted. As the official support and advisory structures for municipalities, CCCs are specifically mandated to implement the terms and conditions set by the Malian government through the DNCT (National Office for Local Governments) and the CCN. They are responsible for providing support and advice on areas within their jurisdiction, increasing understanding of the municipalities' roles and responsibilities, and overseeing the running of local advisory committees. CCCs operate according to fairly strict terms and conditions, devoting a large part of their time to building the capacities of the mayor, his deputies, and municipal staff, helping prepare investment proposals for submission to the ANICT, and tenders for public works. They also collaborate with NGOs, the consultancy firms and the deconcentrated state technical services, which are having to adapt their intervention approach to the new context of devolution.

Municipalities currently derive most of their income from taxes and levies paid for the services they deliver, and funding from the State.³ Few municipalities have large enough businesses on their territory to benefit from trading dues, and many receive nothing from projects or inhabitants that have left to work elsewhere. The ANICT will fund up to 80% of the cost of proposed investments provided the municipalities pay the remaining 20% – something that is not possible for every municipality, given that the various duties and taxes may not generate enough revenue to even meet running costs like staff salaries, etc. Nevertheless, rural municipalities have managed to absorb around 20 billion francs CFA in less than two years, which is 80% to 95% of the money available to them from the ANICT. Over half of this (60%) has been spent on health, education and water development,⁴ in contrast to the low levels of central government investment in health and education, for example.

Despite the taxes and duties prescribed by legislation, rural municipalities are finding it hard to finance decentralisation. Generally, tax recovery rates are poor and uneven. There is limited willingness to pay, because

3. Between 2000 and 2003, State funding amounted to nearly 4.5 million francs CFA.

4. SNV and CEDELO, 2004.

decentralisation has not really taken root in society, not enough has been done to produce the requisite change in attitude, and works of municipalities are not sufficiently visible (Dicko, 2004).

Decentralisation has changed the relationship between the State and local governments and requires a different set of terms to regulate the new partnership between them. Since their inception local governments have automatically assumed powers over areas such as the registry of births, deaths and marriages, enforcement of administrative regulations and public hygiene. However, the central State reclaimed various powers over electoral matters in 2004.⁵

The transfer of powers over other areas has been slow and is still incomplete, even though decrees orders regarding health, education and potable water have been available since June 2002. Their application has proved problematic. Moreover, the municipalities will preside over both the public and the private domain (respectively, natural resources, public utility infrastructures and cultural patrimony; and land, territories and assets transferred to the municipality following their acquisition by another party, or assigned to the municipality to enable it to carry out its mission) but this transfer of domains has not taken place yet.

The new institutional and legal texts give Malian municipal councils considerable responsibility for management of the natural resources in their territory. Several ministries are involved in this complex field,⁶ and the question of land and land tenure is becoming an increasingly pressing concern and source of conflict. In order to achieve a harmonious economic and socio-cultural development that respects and maintains the ecological balance, municipalities must share their natural resource management responsibilities with the village authorities (Diarra, 1998), even though villages are not considered legal entities.

5. This modification of the electoral law was prompted by the observation that, as declared or potential candidates for the municipal elections, mayors should not make decisions about certain sensitive aspects of the elections, particularly regarding polling stations and voting cards (SNV and CEDELO, 2004).

6 The Ministry of the Environment with regard to forests, and the (former) Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock Rearing and Fisheries regarding the Pastoral Charter.

4. The municipalities studied

The southern region of Sikasso covers 71,790km² and has a population of about 1.7 million. It enjoys good climatic conditions and has the greatest potential in terms of natural resources of all the regions in Mali. This region is characterised by intense agricultural and pastoral pressure on forested areas and degradation to the ecosystem caused by the exploitation of forest products. Cotton growing plays an important role in agriculture and has encroached considerably upon the fallow lands and sylvo-pastoral areas of the region. Although southern Mali has no tradition of livestock rearing it is now home to large numbers of livestock as a result of rural investment in herds. These animals have to graze on uncultivable and fallow land – along with livestock belonging to herders that settled here after northern Mali was hit by drought (Coulibaly and Kessler, 1990).

The introduction of administrative boundaries across the country resulted in the creation of three urban municipalities and 144 rural municipalities in the administrative region of Sikasso. This study focuses on two municipalities: Kouoro in Sikasso District, and Yognogo in Koutiala District. Their characteristics are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Characteristics of the two municipalities

Kouoro	Yognogo
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 6 villages ● 6,200 inhabitants ● 6 ethnic groups in the municipality ● Located 80 km north of the town of Sikasso ● The municipal council is drawn from one political party (ADEMA-PASJ) ● There are 7 VAs in the 6 villages ● Pressure on natural resources is intense; herding is a significant activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 3 villages ● 3,811 inhabitants ● 2 ethnic groups in the municipality ● Located 20km north of the town of Koutiala ● The municipal council is drawn from two political parties (ADEMA-PASJ & UDD) ● There are 9 VAs in the 3 villages ● Pressure on natural resources is intense

4.1 Municipality of Kouoro

The municipality of Kouoro is composed of six villages located on the Sikasso-Koutiala axis.⁷ Although the dominant ethnic group is the Sénoufo, the village of Kouoro is mainly populated by incoming Dogon, Fulani and Bobo, who left northern Mali following several droughts.

The main activities are agriculture, livestock rearing, fishing and harvesting wild produce. Pressure on natural resources from farming and pastoral activities is high in every village in this municipality.

The six villages in this municipality have a long shared history predating the colonial period. As members of the same *kafo*,⁸ they performed all their sacrifices and traditional rites in its headquarters in Kouoro, continuing to work and sacrifice together over the years and reinforcing their relationship through marriage ties and other links. Having remained in the same administrative district ever since the colonial period, they decided to stay together as a municipality after decentralisation.

This municipality has six primary schools,⁹ three health centres and a market. These were established with substantial funding from the VAs, most of which was generated by cotton growing. There are two schools in Kouoro and one in every other village except Makono, which shares a school with Sougoula. The three health centres and the market are located in Kouoro.

There are several socio-professional associations in this municipality. Every village has a VA, except for Kouoro, which has two.¹⁰ A herders' co-operative created in 1992 has about 40 members from various ethnic groups spread across 18 villages, six of which belong to the municipality. Some of the people of Kouoro are members of a planters' co-operative, which has its headquarters in the neighbouring municipality of Kléla.

7. Kouoro (the municipality seat), Katierla, Sokourani, Koumbala, Sougoula and Makono.

8. Traditional societies in southern Mali were organised into "*kafo*", the Bamanan term for a group of villages with one centre of decision-making. The *kafo* was managed by a customary chief, who had to authorise all sacrifices and traditional rites within these villages. Various collaborations between villages and even municipalities have developed out of former *kafos*.

9. Lessons are taught in Bamanan in three of these schools.

10. From 1997 onwards the CMDT encouraged the creation of VAs, as part of a pre-co-operative movement that transferred certain rural extension tasks to village communities without giving them any legal status. All the cotton producers in the village belonged to VAs (Kleene et al., 1989), and as the texts regulating rural organisations in Mali evolved, the CMDT asked the VAs to convert to cotton producers' co-operatives. The CMDT will itself be privatised by 2005. Co-operative societies are regulated by Law N° 01-076 of 18 July 2001.

4.2 Municipality of Yognogo

The municipality of Yognogo consists of three villages situated on the Koutiala-San axis: Famoussasso (the municipality seat), Koumbri and Berenianka. This municipality, whose name means “near a water point” in Minyanka, contains a large plain and is crossed by several swamps. The dominant ethnic group is the Minyanka, who live alongside the Fulani. The main activities undertaken by the population are farming and live-stock rearing.

These three villages decided to get together as a municipality because of their long shared history of fishing and their harmonious cohabitation on the plain, which lasted until the droughts at the end of the twentieth century. However, when administrative boundaries were introduced prior to the inauguration of the municipalities, two factions emerged in the village of Berenianka. One group wanted the village to belong to the municipality of Yognogo, while the other wanted to be part of the neighbouring municipality of Logouana. When the administration put the issue to the vote, the majority opted to join the municipality of Yognogo. The village chief belonged to the group that was outvoted, and his clan has since refused to have anything to do with the municipality of Yognogo.

In 1999 the municipality had 3,811 inhabitants spread across 281 farms, 6% of which had no farming equipment, and around 35% of which were relatively well off. Its socio-economic infrastructures consist of a primary school and a weekly market, which are both located in Famoussasso.

As the social cohesion of the three villages weakened, its original organisations split into nine VAs, four of which are in Koumbri, three in Famoussasso and two in Berenianka. In 1999 eight villages, including Koumbri and Berenianka, banded together to form an inter-village organisation called Oussiguignon.¹¹ Its objective is to develop and manage shared village land, regulate access to and use of resources and promote sustainable production systems. An inter-village bureau composed of two representatives from each village has been in place since 1996. Through the intercession of Oussiguignon, certain member villages have developed plantations and pastoral areas and established village woodlands.

11. “Oussiguignon” is a Minyanka expression meaning “Managing our bush”.

4.3 Election and composition of municipal councils

Political elections are not part of traditional rural life, and it seems that local people in both study areas were insufficiently prepared for such an event. Each municipality followed a different strategy for drawing up its list of candidates and organising elections.

Kouoro

The municipality of Kouoro took a more traditional approach to selecting its councillors. The six villages drew up a single list of candidates under the colours of ADEMA-PASJ (Association for Democracy in Mali – African Party for Solidarity and Justice) and elected a municipal council drawn entirely from this party, which was the only one to run for the 1999 municipal elections.¹²

Before the elections, the village chiefs and their advisors proposed a list of potential municipal councillors and officers, which was then legalised by the elections. The 11 seats of the municipal council are divided between the six villages, with each village council designating a certain number of representatives according to the size of their village. In the village of Kouoro, indigenous villagers consulted incomers regarding the selection and election of their councillors, so the seats are divided between three ethnic groups: three councillors are Bambara, two are Minyanka and one is Dogon. The five other councillors, who are Sénoufo, come from the other villages (one from each village). All 11 councillors learned some basic French at school: five dropped the subject at the end of their primary education, three continued to learn it for another two years, and the remaining three received vocational training in French at high school. Given the low levels of education among the rural population, this is a well-educated council. Young people are poorly represented on the council, which includes two women – the matron from Kouoro village and the women’s village extension agent.

The relatively high turnout for the elections in this municipality is probably due to the social cohesion of its population and the fact that potential candidates for the municipal council were selected by the village authorities (see Table 2).

12. There are now three other political parties in the municipality: the UDD, the RPM and the PDIS. All four got together to organise the 2002 presidential and legislative elections in a collaboration that helped maintain stability in the municipality. Apart from the first deputy mayor, who switched parties to join the RPM, municipal councillors have always belonged to ADEMA. The RPM broke away from ADEMA in 2001/2002.

Village	Potential voters	Number of votes	Level of participation
Kouoro	1,732	497	29%
Katierla	474	193	41%
Sokourani	319	272	85%
Koumbala	531	157	30%
Sougoula/Makono	700	469	67%
Total	3,756	1,588	42%

Yognogo

Unlike their counterparts in Kouoro, villagers in this municipality had two political parties to choose from. ADEMA-PASJ and UDD both put forward candidates for the municipal elections, and their political managers organised local information and awareness-raising campaigns to encourage villagers to get involved. They found representatives in each village to act as intermediaries and mobilise activists around party activities, setting up a local party office and selecting candidates for the elections, etc. Each party presented a list of 11 candidates drawn from the three villages, and two young graduates seeking work put themselves forward for the post of mayor in the municipality.

Table 3 below shows that turnout for the elections was very low in this municipality (9%). This could be due to the fact that the village authorities were hardly involved in selecting the candidates.

Councillors in Yognogo are younger and less educated than their counterparts in Kouoro. Their average age is 38, with seven of them aged between 26-35 years old. All eleven are endogenous Minyanika from the area. As a group, they are not particularly well educated: four received basic training in French at school (two at primary school and one going on to study it at higher level), six have received literacy training in Bamanan, and one has had no form of literacy training. Their relative lack of education can partly be explained by the fact that Yognogo has only had a school for the last three years, while there has been a school in Kouoro since colonial times.

Village	Potential voters	Number of votes	Level of participation	Election results for each party		
				ADEMA-PASJ	UDD	Total no. of councillors
Famoussasso	972	92	10%	3	1	4
Berenianka				2	0	2
Koumbri	800	67	8%	3	2	5
Total	1,772	159	9%	8	3	11

4.4 Electing a mayor and establishing a municipal office

After the municipal elections, the prefects (who oversee the municipalities) supervised the election of municipal officers and municipal representatives on the district council. To prepare them for this event ADEMA-PASJ organised training for its elected local officials on elections and the tasks carried out by municipal offices.

The mayoral elections in Kouoro passed off without any problems, and the candidates proposed by the village chiefs and their advisors were duly voted into office. In Yognogo, however, councillors abandoned their party affiliations after the municipal elections and realigned themselves according to their village territories. Negotiations over the mayoral elections took place at village level, this time with the close involvement of the village chiefs. Fielding five of the eleven municipal councillors, Koumbri tried to negotiate with two other villages to get one of its own elected as mayor, but the position eventually went to a rival graduate put forward by Famoussasso – a young woman born in this village who had moved some 400km away after her marriage.

Both candidates belonged to ADEMA-PASJ, and when party managers learned that a woman wanted to become the mayor of Yognogo they sent a letter supporting her to their local branch in Koutiala. Copies were then forwarded to each of the ADEMA-PASJ councillors in the municipality, arriving when the villages were in the middle of negotiating the selection of a candidate. Because the municipal councillors did not have

a very sophisticated grasp of French and no attempt was made to explain the letter or clarify its meaning, it was interpreted as an attempt to force the female candidate through. As a result, Koumbri promptly withdrew from all municipal activities, and the municipal office was set up by six municipal councillors from Famoussasso and Berenianka, who filled all six posts (mayor, three deputies and two delegates on the district council) under the supervision of the prefect from Koutiala district.

As the only female mayor in the region of Sikasso, the 29 year-old mayor of Yognogo represents a cultural revolution in Mali. She completed her training at agricultural college in 1996, and having obtained the support of the village elders, presented herself as a candidate for the municipal elections in Yognogo. As an active member of ADEMA-PASJ, she then participated in meetings to raise awareness about the forthcoming elections at every social level of the municipality.

Her term as mayor began in a climate of considerable social tension, partly due to the problems between the different villages, and partly because of her being a woman. The municipality split into two main camps, with traditionalists on the one hand and modernisers on the other. The former, conservative element finds it hard to accept a woman as the primary official in their municipality, firmly believing that this could disrupt village and even household management systems, since women are supposed to carry out orders, not give them. In the other camp, the “modernisers” claim that attention should be focused on an official’s abilities rather than their gender. They point out that many projects and NGOs now seek to collaborate directly with women, and that having a female mayor could be very useful in helping the municipality establish a partnership with these support structures.

Training for newly elected officials

Although the MDD has produced various documents to provide mayors and councillors with information about decentralisation, they are all written in French. This kind of documentation clearly needs to be adapted, in this case particularly for the officials in Yognogo, who need a version in Banaman accessible to people with their level of education. After the election various projects and NGOs working in the area provided training for the municipal councillors and, initially, civil society groups, to enable them to better understand and fulfil their respective roles. The CCCs have supported the two municipalities since 2000, especially their municipal offices.

5. What the municipalities have achieved in three years

After their investiture by government representatives (current prefects), the municipal authorities had to set to work finding the wherewithal to proceed with development activities in their area. Temporary sites for both of the mayors' offices were provided by village chiefs, and the municipal councils then had to buy or borrow basic equipment such as tables, chairs, paper, registers, means of transport, etc. Councillors initially borrowed means of transport from farmers' organisations or used their own transport to attend municipal meetings, but work-related materials/equipment were eventually purchased out of the municipal budget.

5.1 Kouoro municipality

Functioning of the municipal council

The municipal office holds two meetings per month and the municipal council meets once a month. The council has four working committees chaired by members of the municipal office, which cover Finance; Registry office and population census; Land and tenure affairs; and Environment, health and living conditions. Although councillors in this municipality have a good grasp of the issues involved, actions are slow to materialise because the working committees are not responsible for implementing decisions.

Through its partnership with the CCC and NGOs, the municipal council has been able to receive some training on municipal administration. It is in regular contact with the prefect regarding municipal affairs, largely through the mayor and the secretary general, and has managed to get the sub-prefect to intervene so that livestock traders now sell their animals on the site developed for this purpose.

Consultation and dialogue with local people

The mayor of Kouoro has proved to be good at making things happen. This is partly due to his relationship with the council of village chiefs, which is the main interlocutor of the municipal council. Village chiefs are always consulted before deliberations and informed when decisions are taken, and also act as intermediaries passing on messages for the municipal office.

In principle, the municipal council also consults local people before taking any important decisions. Each councillor is accountable to his or her village, and should represent its views at municipal council meetings and report back on what has been decided. This system seems to work, and villagers are kept informed about council decisions even if they don't always agree with them. For example, herders participated in meetings to discuss the municipal development plan, made a number of proposals and were informed that some of their suggestions had not been taken into account. Although they were unhappy with this it did not prevent them from working in partnership with the municipality on formulating a local pastoral agreement.

The municipal council relies on youth and women's associations to carry out community activities. It has no direct partnership with socio-professional organisations, even though they are the driving force behind development and could help resolve problems and better organise activities if they became involved in municipal works.

However, it seems that women as well as migrants, are excluded from channels of communication on municipality affairs and decision making. For example, women's associations say that they are not informed about municipal council activities or consulted regarding its development plan or budget; while wood sellers, who are mainly Dogon migrants that have settled on land belonging to Sougoula, are informed about municipal activities by village councillors but take no part in them, saying that they just follow the indigenous villagers. In 2002 the municipal authorities set up a commission to look at the mechanisms for communication between the various actors concerned with development in the municipality. This is chaired by the first deputy mayor and supported by an NGO.

Revenue generation

The most up to date information available on Kouoro's municipal budget is for 2000, when the municipality received a total income of 9,833,282 francs CFA against expenditure of 7,034,947 francs CFA (56% of which was for municipal operating costs). One source of revenue is the regional and local development tax (TDRL), which in this municipality has a very high recovery rate of between 90 to 100%. Sougoula village council suggested that this may be due to the fact that duties and taxes used to be paid in a lump sum but can now be paid in instalments, which has probably helped improve recovery levels. The creation of the municipality also made it possible to

draw up a more reliable tax roll, since this was compiled by municipal officials who know the local population of their area. Heads of household used to be ordered to pay taxes on behalf of family members that were no longer alive, as well as school children and women with more than four children, but the situation has been regularised since the municipality was established and they now pay taxes normally. The number of taxpayers increased from 1,828 in 1999 to 2,701 in 2001. One of the problems the municipality has to contend with relates to mobility, as many migrants prefer to pay TDRL in their native village even though they are permanently settled in the municipality of Kouoro. The high levels of tax recovery may also be due to the fact that the municipality has the support of the village authorities, which it regularly consults; and the fact that villagers were used to paying taxes well before the municipality was inaugurated.

Other sources of income include allied taxes (livestock, weapons, bicycles), taxes on markets and administrative services (civil registry, legislation, family record book) and state subsidies (around 2 million francs CFA in 2000). Revenue could also be raised by charging tax for garbage collection, and from the municipality's share of the trading dues paid to the State, the sale of plots for housing, and management of livestock markets, although it is more difficult to recover these taxes and other duties than it is to collect the TDRL. Kouoro village council claims that local people don't pay these other taxes because they are not afraid of the mayor. While this may be true, it does not mean that everyone is happy about the new set-up, as villagers from Sokourani complain that taxes have increased since the municipality was created (bicycle tax rose from a pre-municipal rate of 500 francs CFA per bicycle to 1,000 francs CFA).

Because it receives little funding from the State, the municipality has to raise the money to cover its operating costs and fund 20% of any proposed investment. Although its TDRL recovery rate is excellent compared with other rural municipalities,¹⁵ overall revenue generation is still relatively low and therefore precludes any major investment. Given this situation, there is a certain amount of resentment about the fact that the municipalities provide a large proportion of the district council and regional assembly's financial resources, even though they do not participate in municipal development activities

15. The national average TDRL recovery rate of 18% for the first quarter of 2003 looked unlikely to improve much by the end of the year (Dicko, 2004).

Achievements

Although the municipality is a young institution with much to learn and few financial resources, it has undertaken numerous activities that will contribute to socio-economic development in the locality. In addition to this local people are now able to register births and marriages at the municipal town hall in Kouoro, instead of having to go to Kléla. Since its inception, the municipality has accomplished the following achievements and major activities:

- Secretary general and manager recruited;
- Town hall equipped;
- Antenatal clinic constructed within the community health centre (CSCOM);
- Funding for health services: emergency medical transport to Sikasso (55,050 francs CFA per year), matron's salary (285,000 francs CFA);
- 15 mosquito nets purchased (45,000 francs CFA): 3 for the maternity clinic and 12 for the elderly;
- School stationery purchased (300,000 francs CFA per year);
- Positive outcome of negotiations with Sikasso district council regarding the commencement of secondary education, which falls within its jurisdiction;
- Construction work has begun on three classrooms for secondary school pupils;
- Hard shoulder constructed to facilitate vehicular access to the market;
- A one-hectare eucalyptus plantation has been established each year;
- Discussions have been held regarding a local NRM agreement with two neighbouring municipalities and a project involving 10 municipalities from Sikasso district.

Despite these achievements, there are complaints that certain villages have not directly benefited from the municipality. The village chief from Sokourani, for example, bemoans the fact that his village still has no community health centre.

Other initiatives in the municipality

Conflict prevention and management

Conflicts between different natural resource users are a frequent occurrence in the municipality, particularly between farmers and herders, and “hunters”¹⁶ and herders. Most local people assume that conflict management was taken out of the hands of the village councils when local

16. Hunters or “chasseurs” are a type of traditional militia dating back to pre-colonial times, who protect the village against crime and oversee the woodlands.

governments were put in place, and that the municipal authorities will handle it in the same way that canton chiefs used to. Social conflicts are referred back to the relevant village council for amicable settlement by the mayor. Mayors also seem to play a positive role in disputes that are beyond the mediation capacities of the village authorities, thereby helping reduce the number of conflicts that go to court.¹⁷

This has certainly been the case in Kouoro. Since the pasturing of livestock on a harvested field caused outcry in the village in 2001, the mayor has played a major role in mitigating this type of conflict by helping establish a local NRM agreement to reopen livestock corridors. Thus, in Kouoro, the creation of the municipality has generally helped improve understanding between local people.

Security

Local security is another issue that concerns the mayor. Situated at the intersection of a major road and a tributary of the river Niger, Kouoro has fairly well developed trade links extending over the border into Burkina Faso. To tackle the insecurity caused by these links, the mayor successfully negotiated the creation of a flying squad in the village of Kouoro and mobilised the services of the *gendarmerie* to improve security for local people and their property.

The town hall also asked hunters to help with these patrols – a move that proved effective, but which also raised questions about the way that miscreants are dealt with. The hunters claim that although many thieves have been arrested since the municipality was created, they are always freed by State administrators and simply return to their nefarious activities. The hunters are so fed up with this that they have stopped arresting “wrongdoers” and are requesting written confirmation from the municipal authorities that they are responsible for surveillance of the municipality, as well as assurances that the municipal council will do all it can to ensure that those who are arrested will be tried and sentenced accordingly.

5.2 Municipality of Yognogo

Functioning of the municipal council

The poor turnout at the municipal elections in Yognogo (9%) affects the legitimacy of the municipal council, whose early days were overshadowed

17. However, there have also been cases where the mayor has been at the centre of a conflict. In the peri-urban zone of Bamako, problems have arisen when the mayor and other actors are competing over control of land and/or programmes to parcel and sell off public lands to urban developers.

by negotiations over the distribution of posts in the municipal office (including that of mayor). With no functional working committees, the municipal authorities' activities seem to be restricted to one village (Famoussasso) and one neighbourhood in Berenianka.

The three-year municipal development plan drawn up in 2001 focused on education, health, village water development, waste management and environmental protection. According to the municipal council, local people were invited to participate in formulating this plan and encouraged to give their points of view. However, although the village councils, VAs and women's associations attended the presentation of the development plan and its associated budget, they are unclear about its exact content and about how the budget will be allocated. The women also claim that municipal development activities take no account of some of their concerns, such as the need for a maternity clinic, a village pharmacy, a mill and market gardens.

Local people can find out about municipal affairs from minutes posted in the mayor's office¹⁸ and via the local radio station. The mayor uses the State administration as the main channel of information on the outside world, as well as the many workshops and conferences to which she is invited. Within the municipality, village chiefs are used to transmit information to local people: in theory, municipal councillors inform them and they pass the information on to villagers. However, this mechanism does not seem to work, as even Koumbri village council is not informed about decisions taken by the municipal council, and villagers mainly get this information by talking directly to the mayor and her secretary general. The latter claims that the majority of the population respects the decisions taken by the municipal council, although there are still "recalcitrant elements that refuse to recognise the municipal authorities".

Revenue generation

The research team could not obtain any information on income and expenditure in this municipality. The proposed budget for 2003 was 16,292,783 francs CFA, of which 41% was operating costs – almost double the amount budgeted by the larger municipality of Kouoro. Securing the funds required will be difficult. Yognogo is not only smaller, but many of its inhabitants pay no tax, partly because of dissension between and within the different villages. Levels of TDRL recovery were low before the municipality was inau-

18. The secretary general was unwilling to give the team a copy of the municipal plan without the (absent) mayor's consent, and the budget and financial statement were also unavailable. We were told that local people could have a copy provided they paid for it.

gured, and its creation does not seem to have made the population any more willing to pay their taxes.

The municipal council thinks that money could also be raised by parcelling and selling off public lands to urban developers, charging fees for developing and using the plain, ticketing in markets, women's market gardening and issuing identity cards.

Achievements

The mayor cites the following major activities as examples of what has been achieved since the municipality was created:

- Secretary general and manager recruited;
- Motor bike purchased for municipal errands;
- Typewriter purchased for secretarial work;
- A civil register now exists for the municipality;
- Three teachers recruited for the school;
- Construction of a bridge linking Famoussasso and Berenianka (funded by ANICT);
- Women organised into village-level women's associations with the support of the mayor; literacy training and training on soap making organised.

After a difficult start progress has been made in getting the municipal councillors from Koumbri to participate in municipal activities,¹⁹ although there still is a lack of communication between the villages and the municipal council. This can be put down to the poor communication between the various actors concerned and failure to mobilise sufficient financial and human resources. In addition to these difficulties, the municipality does not have a stable core of municipal support staff, and activities are concentrated in its main town. Having a female mayor has added to deeper-seated tensions and does not seem to have facilitated easier access to NGOs or funding, despite the fact that she is invited to numerous workshops and training sessions.

19. The situation has improved slightly, but there are still tensions. Inhabitants of the "opposing" village claim that the mayor is not doing what is expected of her, is manipulated by the village chief from Famoussasso and commands little respect, partly because she is a woman and partly because she lives outside the municipality in Koutiala.

6. Discussion

This paper has described two municipalities with very different dynamics: differences that mainly stem from the cohesion and understanding between their constituent villages, the manner in which the municipality was created, local authority involvement in the elections and conflicts over the selection of their municipal officers.

6.1 Democracy or “legalised consensus”?

Rural people are not accustomed to political elections, which are a new experience for communities used to the workings of chiefdoms and the administration. The inhabitants of these municipalities were neither sufficiently informed about the process of decentralisation nor well prepared for this exercise.

In Yognogo, village chiefs were not involved in the elections. The village authorities allowed themselves to be sidelined and appear to have made no attempt to mobilise local people around the municipal elections. The field was dominated by young graduates from the locality seeking employment through their political parties, which proposed the list of candidates. As only 9% of the population participated in these elections there was some concern about the legitimacy of the municipal council; and the situation worsened when the election of a female mayor exacerbated a dispute between certain villages in the municipality.

In Kouoro, on the other hand, the village chiefs understood the importance of getting the “right kind of people” on the municipal council. In this case the elections were used to legalise the choice of the customary village authorities, which took care to ensure that not only was each village represented on the municipal council, but that it also included migrants and several women. The elected officials in Kouoro are relatively well educated, indicating that the customary authorities selected their representatives from local “intellectuals”, producing a council that seems to have been able to achieve far more than the one in Yognogo that was elected according to more democratic rules.

While it may have been caution that prompted the village chiefs and their

advisors to put so much effort into the careful selection of their “elected municipal officials”, their concerted action was only possible because of the social cohesion in Kouoro. The list of candidates proposed by the village authorities was endorsed at the polls, and since almost half of the electorate voted (42%), the municipal council is recognised and legitimised by the local population. The municipality was therefore able to move forward from a basis of consensus, with the support of a large proportion of the population.

In Kouoro the village and municipal authorities consult each other over management of the municipality and it is normal for the traditional authorities to assist the municipal council in dealing with conflicts between natural resource users. It seems that the village chiefs only intervened in municipal affairs related to their own centre of interest: village lands within the municipality. While they might accept that some work will be undertaken in the main town of the municipality, they also push for investment in their own villages and complain about paying taxes. The municipal council may have been established on the basis of consensus, but much still needs to be done to foster genuine and widespread “municipal consciousness” (Cissé et al., 2003).

6.2 The role of political parties

In order to raise their profile, certain political parties went into villages in rural areas to identify candidates and encourage local people to vote for them in the elections.²⁰ However, they had neither the time nor the resources to be genuinely effective in mobilising and informing these rural communities, and gave their candidates very little support after the elections. In general political parties seem to be more active in urban and peri-urban municipalities, which are closer to the centre of power and where the stakes are higher, especially in terms of land.

None of the political parties played an active role in Kouoro in 1999. Instead they accepted the list of candidates proposed by the villages, which were probably worried that the parties might create or exacerbate local conflicts. This was very different to what happened in Yognogo, where the political parties drew up the list of candidates and influenced the choice of mayor by supporting a female candidate.

The 2004 elections will be held in a very different context, as potential

20. In other areas of Mali various opposition parties used the mistrust of the decentralised municipal authorities then prevalent to encourage people to boycott the elections, and no-one voted in some villages.

candidates and the electorate now have a clearer understanding of the functions of the mayor and elected officials, as well as the benefits and constraints associated with these posts²¹. This time round the political parties seem a little more interested in the rural electorate, and some of the many new parties to emerge have established themselves in the two study municipalities over the last few years. None of them have called for a boycott of the elections, as happened in 1999. In Mali it is also possible to stand as an independent candidate.

6.3 Representing a heterogeneous population

The choice and composition of local authorities has obvious political and economic significance in areas where the population is heterogeneous and incomers make up a significant proportion of the community. The ratification of “customary” powers could reinforce potentially exclusive systems, strengthening the property rights of the indigenous population and undermining or even challenging rights granted to migrants over successive generations. On the other hand, the election of “democratic” authorities could put power in the hands of migrants and provoke a backlash from the indigenous population (Lavigne Delville, 1999). Although incomers outnumber the indigenous inhabitants of the main town of Kouoro, neither of the scenarios described above occurred in this municipality because “customary powers” took account of its ethnic diversity and created a council composed of locals and incomers, and men and women. The main concern now is to ensure that all these groups participate more effectively in the affairs of the municipality.

As far as we know, political parties do not oblige their local representatives to draw up a balanced list of candidates, even though this is the key to ensuring that more women, migrants and other less powerful social groups are elected as officials. If a political party does not accept a woman at the top of its list of candidates, she can neither be elected as an official nor become mayor.

6.4 Resurgence of conflicts

It was probably inevitable that certain conflicts would rekindle or take on a different form with the onset of decentralisation in rural areas; and that

21. In 1999, many councillors had been unaware of the fact that mayors are not paid a salary but receive a monthly allowance of around 25,000 francs CFA and several successful candidates from the civil service proved reluctant to take up their post when they realised it meant losing their salary while in office.

disputes would arise over the setting of boundaries within municipalities, the choice of their main town or the election of their mayor. Competition over the main town is not simply a matter of prestige and recognition: it involves the future of a village that could become the main seat and focus of power and investment.²² This is certainly the case in Yognogo, where the main town has attracted most of the investments made by the municipality.

It is important to recognise that villages may see the transfer of prerogatives to local governments and the mayor as the centralisation of decision-making, rather than its decentralisation. Existing divisions between and within villages in Yognogo were exacerbated by the setting of new boundaries, and deteriorated further after the mayoral elections appeared to degenerate into a battle between two villages. The election of a young woman as mayor not only offended the more conservative element of the community, but also prompted the “losing” village to withdraw from municipal activities and cast doubt on the legitimacy of the municipal office.

6.5 Capacity building

The municipal councillors in Yognogo and most of their counterparts across Mali have received little formal education, unlike the “intellectuals” selected by village chiefs in Kouoro. It is not easy for municipal councillors to gain access to information because the documentation on decentralisation issued to them and to mayors is all written in French. This information would be more accessible if it was also available in Bamanan.²³

Elected municipal officials have been fairly slow to assume their roles and responsibilities in the new socio-political landscape created by decentralisation. The CCCs have played an important role in getting them started, but have mainly focused on municipal offices and municipal staff. This is understandable, given the huge effort involved in setting up a town hall, and the need to help councillors and staff prepare municipal plans and get their budgets approved in order to release ANICT funding for investment. However, it also makes it difficult for the municipalities to become firmly rooted in society. CCCs in Sikasso region have to deal with low levels of education and understanding among most elected officials, a lack of appro-

22. In several municipalities the majority of elected officials live in the main town, leaving other villages with no representative. However, it is not always possible for every village to be represented, such as in cases where there are twelve villages in the municipality but only eleven councillors.

23. According to a study conducted by FIL in 1999, 74% of elected officials in the districts of Sikasso and Kadiolo can only read and write in Bamanan.

priate service providers, mayors that are not available, personnel changes in town halls, the internal functioning of rural councils, the town halls' relationships with local people and the administration, and the generation and transparent and effective management of resources.

6.6 Partnership with the population

The two municipalities studied have very different partnerships with their constituent population. While Kouoro is actively engaged with the communities under its jurisdiction, Yognogo is less so because part of its population is opposed to the municipal office.

Kouoro has involved migrants and women in the municipal council, although this is not reflected in the design and implementation of municipal development programmes, and it seems that these minorities hardly participate in discussions organised by the village authorities. Officials in Kouoro seem to be more aware of the importance of communicating with villagers, but the fact that they do so mainly through the village chiefs means that groups with less influence in customary structures (women, youth and migrants) run the risk of being sidelined.

It has also been observed that the VAs now receive fewer requests for assistance and support from the municipal office than they did initially. This tendency for the municipal office to feel that it is solely responsible for the development of the municipality may have been reinforced by the CCCs' virtually exclusive focus on the mayor and deputees, and town hall personnel, leaving other elected officials and civil society organisations with very little support (SNV and CEDELO, 2004).

Municipal councils do not seem to see the development of a training and information programme as a priority, although this is essential for decentralisation to succeed (Cissé et al., 2003). Municipalities need the active support of their communities in order to be viable and able to help improve local living standards. The challenge for the next term is to get all elected officials (including those outside the municipal office) and civil society groups more involved in municipal affairs.

6.7 Activities

The municipal councils conducted socio-economic appraisals to assess the situation in their municipality and identify the opportunities and constraints

for development, which were then set out in pluriannual municipal development plans. Although the municipalities enlisted various NGOs and consultancy firms to help develop their economic and socio-cultural development plans (PDESC), the private service providers seem to lack the technical skills required to formulate such plans while the technical services had very little to do with the process. Most of these plans, which will be enormously hard to implement, seem to have been designed to facilitate access to ANICT funds; and the municipalities seem much more concerned about meeting ANICT criteria and financial deadlines than about getting local people to participate in the process of implementing PDESCs.

In reality, PDESCs and investment in infrastructures are just one element of municipal activities: Kouoro has shown that these also include contributing to NRM, preventing conflicts and improving security. Here and elsewhere in Mali mayors are playing an important role in resolving various conflicts, showing that the creation of municipalities has introduced an additional mechanism for managing and mediating conflicts that could help keep them out of the courts.

The design and implementation of the local development programmes for these two municipalities reflect their councillors' overriding concern about education, health, potable water development and road infrastructures. In addition to focusing on these sectors, considerable effort has been invested in establishing the offices of the town hall, where the stability and quality of municipal staff play an important role in its capacity to fulfil its new responsibilities.

The financial resources mobilised in Kouoro and Yognogo are mainly used to cover the operating costs of the municipal council. Officials are heavily dependent on ANICT funding for any major investments, and frequently have difficulty finding the 20% balance required to release this money.

Opportunities for investment partly depend on a municipality's capacity to generate revenue, which is itself dependent upon the support of its inhabitants. However, it will be difficult for the municipalities to increase their income until certain powers have been transferred to them, a process that seems to have been delayed by the complexity of these competences. While municipalities could take certain measures to improve their revenue generation, it is crucial that they receive support from the State, particularly through the transfer of authority and human and financial resources.

7. Conclusions

The institutional reform of decentralisation came into effect after the election and investiture of the local governments in 1999. The process of implementing decentralisation rapidly unfolded across the country as different levels of local government (municipal, district and regional) were put in place almost simultaneously so that they could respond effectively to the hopes and expectations raised by the reform. The end of the municipal councils' first term in 2004 marks the close of a period during which everyone involved had much to learn about devolved public administration and local development.

Local governments have been hampered by their lack of technical capacity in municipal management and administration, and their inexperience in establishing links with other local actors and the population in general. Over time, municipal authorities have tended to collaborate less with customary authorities or rural organisations and, despite the advantages of such collaboration, the municipal office seems to feel that it is solely responsible for municipal development. Rural councils could perform better if they sought support from various agencies and worked with them on development activities, possibly by delegating certain competences. The capacity of the municipalities to act and promote local development could also be increased by contracting certain powers out to socio-professional village organisations, such as ASACO, parent/student associations, VAs, etc. Clearly, these rural organisations and customary village authorities should not be abandoned by support structures in favour of the municipal councils.

It is important for all stakeholders (civil society, local governments, the State, political parties, NGOs, projects and donors) to understand that decentralisation does not end with the establishment of local governments and their elected bodies. Vibrant democracies also need opposition which require an informed and engaged population. Implementing decentralisation, getting it established and appropriated, and installing genuine local governance is a long-term process. Local governments and civil society organisations will continue to need training and information for years to come in order to consolidate the decentralisation process, which will also need sustained support at every level in order to contribute to sustainable and equitable development.

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**International Institute for
Environment and Development
3 Endsleigh Street
London WC1H 0DD
UK**

**Tel: (+44 20) 7388 2117
Fax: (+44 20) 7388 2826
E-mail: drylands@iied.org
Website: www.iied.org**

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