

Securing the commons No.2

Hannu Biyu Ke Tchuda Juna¹ – Strength in Unity

Shared management of
common property resources.
A case study from Takiéta, Niger.

by Gill and Kees Vogt
May 2000

¹ Two hands can wash each other (Hausa proverb)



About the authors

Gill Vogt trained in livestock production but has subsequently spent the past twelve years working in East and West Africa on the social aspects of local natural resource management issues. She has been working with SOS Sahel for the past ten years and is currently the Community Development Advisor to the SOS Sahel Niger Programme.

Kees Vogt is a social forester who has been working for the past fifteen years on community and joint management of natural resources in the arid lands of both East and West Africa. He has been a field member of the SOS Sahel International (UK) team since 1989 and is currently the SOS Sahel (UK) in Niger Programme Director.

They can be contacted at the following address:

BP 160, Zinder, Niger. Tel: (227) 510 539; Fax: (227) 510 193; e-mail: sahelgb@intnet.ne

About the SMCPR Action Research Programme

The regional action-research programme *Shared Management of Common Property Resources in the Sahel (SMCPR)* is a three year regional action-research programme seeking to promote institutional arrangements for the equitable and sustainable management of common property resources in the Sahel.

The programme is a partnership made up of six national and international organisations working in the UK, Mali, Niger, Ethiopia and Sudan. These are SOS Sahel UK in Mali, Niger, Ethiopia, Sudan and London, IIED in Edinburgh, FARM-Africa in Ethiopia, Near East Foundation and Réseau Gestion Décentralisé des Ressources Naturelles en 5ème Région in Mali and Association pour la Redynamisation de l'Élevage au Niger in Niger. It is co-ordinated by SOS Sahel International (UK) and IIED Drylands Programme and is funded by three different donors: Comic Relief; the British Government's Department for International Development (DFID); and the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD).

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Summary

The Takiéta Forest Reserve covers an area of 6720 hectares in the south east of Niger. It is the largest uncultivated area in the region and is, for the agricultural and pastoral people who use it, a very important source of pasture and tree products. In the forty-five years since it was classified, social and climatic change has brought about more intensive and anarchic use by many more people.

In 1995, the Government of Niger invited SOS Sahel to set up a project to examine how the forest could be successfully managed by all the people who use it. The main priority of the project has been to ensure genuine participation of all stakeholders in the creation of an effective local management structure (LMS), and subsequently in the development of a management strategy. The main role of the project has thus been one of facilitation. This facilitation has taken many forms from financing fora and providing advice and training, to facilitating contacts with potential future partners (donors and other local resource management bodies) for the LMS.

This publication traces the sequence of events from the project's inception in 1995 to the establishment of a joint forest management plan in December 1999. It provides an overview of the project, its aims and approach and describes the process followed by the project team, the communities and other stakeholders of the Takiéta Forest Reserve in their bid to define an inclusive management system for the forest. The process is ongoing, as the communities prepare to implement their management system from January 2000, but important lessons have been learned along the way.

The project is an example of how national and international policies of decentralised natural resource management can be put into practice. The project's experience documented here highlights key issues that are pertinent to the sustainable and equitable management of common property resources in the Sahel. It is not intended to provide a management model; rather it aims to identify the essential elements for creating an enabling environment in which effective, decentralised and equitable local management can take place.

Introduction

The Takiéta Joint Forest Management Project (TJFMP) implemented by SOS Sahel¹ in eastern Niger is an ongoing experiment to help local people manage a common resource in an inclusive way. The project is an example of how national and international policies of decentralised natural resource management can be put into practice.

This publication traces the sequence of events from the project's inception in April 1995 to the establishment of a joint forest management plan in December 1999. It provides an overview of the project, its aims and approach, and describes the process followed by the project, the communities and other stakeholders of the Takiéta Forest Reserve in their bid to define an inclusive management system for the forest. The process is ongoing, as the communities prepare to implement their management system from January 2000, but important lessons have been learnt along the way.

The Takiéta experience presented here is not intended to provide a management model. Rather, the aim is to share the project's practical experience and to highlight key elements that have enabled a process of participatory decision-making to take place. It is this process that we want to share with others working towards the sustainable and equitable management of common property resources in the Sahel.

¹ See appendix 1 for a brief presentation of SOS Sahel, its mission and way of working.

The context

2

Country context

Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world. Following a coup d'état in April 1999 Niger was officially in transition until democratic elections were held at the end of the year. The new government has been in power since January 2000². The country has a declared policy of political decentralisation³, including decentralised natural resource management, but the implementation process is hampered by lack of finances.

While decentralisation as a political process may take some time to be fully implemented, the very fact that the process is underway means that the policy and legislative environment in Niger is conducive to initiatives such as that at Takiéta described here. Experiments providing practical lessons on how power and responsibility can be most effectively transferred back to local people are on the government's agenda.

SOS Sahel UK in Niger works closely with the Forest Department and given its practical experience has a role in helping Niger find ways of working towards sustainable, decentralised natural resource management. In recognition of this, the government has given SOS Sahel UK the mandate to experiment⁴ in how to facilitate a process that genuinely promotes natural resource management by local people.

The Takiéta Forest Reserve

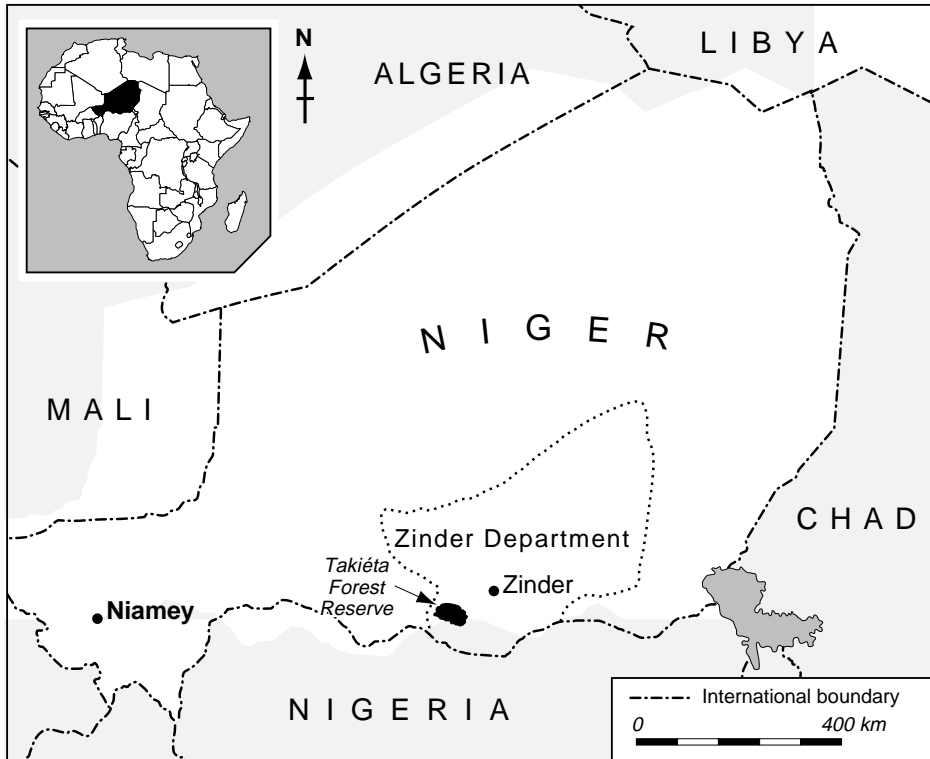
The Takiéta Forest Reserve is located 53km west of the regional capital Zinder just south of the national highway, in the department of Zinder (figure 1). Annual rainfall in this agro-pastoral zone is between 250-400mm and is highly variable in time and space. Covering an area of 6,720ha, the Forest Reserve represents the

² Presidential elections took place in November 1999 with the election of Mr Tanja Mahamadou of the MNND party.

³ Although decentralisation has been on the Nigerien agenda for several years, its effective implementation was stalled following the coups d'Etat of 1996 and 1999. Now that a new, democratically elected government is in place there are high hopes it will return to the government's attention.

⁴ It is implicitly understood that experimentation allows operation beyond the normal limits as defined by existing legislation.

Figure 1: Location of Takiéta Forest Reserve



largest non-cultivated area in the region and is regarded by both resident and non-resident users as a very important sylvo-pastoral resource in a zone otherwise entirely occupied by fields. It is, however, under threat and facing a range of problems

In 1995, when the project began, the forest was already in an advanced state of degradation (both in terms of vegetation cover and species composition) due to combined climatic and human influences.

The reserve was theoretically managed and protected by the State, but in reality, it was subject to uncontrolled and destructive exploitation by local people and outsiders. The boundaries of the reserve were more or less officially known but in certain areas they were no longer visibly defined. Illegal and long term inhabitants were installed principally at the centre (scattered settlement) and at the north-western limit (extension of the village of Takiéta). Illegal (but unchallenged), uncontrolled and rapidly expanding agricultural clearance was taking place at the centre and fields were encroaching along the southern limit.

The area remaining uncultivated outside the reserve was shrinking as the sedentary populations extended their fields while simultaneously shifting towards livestock production. Pressure on the forest reserve as a pastoral resource from these sedentary populations, was growing. In addition, the forest was visited with varying degrees of regularity by transhumant pastoralist groups⁵ based locally and much further afield. It was not clear that these different groups (see box 1) would have the same interests and priorities with respect to the future of the forest reserve.

Finally, there were potentially three different local government authorities with a stake in the forest (the forest falls into three different Cantons⁶), at least one of which was lobbying for the 'de-reservation' of the resource.

Box 1. The forest users

The local populations with an interest in the forest can be roughly divided into three types according to their proximity to the forest:

i) Residents close to the forest:

- Haussa communities living permanently around the forest, who practice primarily agriculture but who are increasingly tending towards small scale, sedentary livestock production.
- Settled Fulani and Touareg communities living permanently around the forest, who practice primarily agriculture but nevertheless retain a relatively strong pastoral identity.

ii) Residents further away from the forest but still 'local':

- Permanently settled Fulani and Touareg agro-pastoral groups cultivating in the area but for whom pastoral production is still a key element necessitating seasonal transhumance for at least a certain part of the family.

iii) Non-residents from further afield:

- Fulani (Wodaabe and Ouda) and Touareg pastoral groups who come from much further afield in Niger and who use the forest as a more or less strategic resource as part of their seasonal transhumance. The regularity, timing and frequency of visits by these users are determined by the state of pastoral resources elsewhere in the country at any given moment. The transhumance involves the movement of the whole family.
- Fulani pastoral communities based in the north of Nigeria who pass through the area annually as part of their north-bound transhumance route at the start of the rainy season and again south-bound at the end of the agricultural season.

⁵ For both transhumant and sedentary populations, the area covered by the reserve is more important for its (officially) non cultivated status than for its value (quality) as a pastoral resource.

⁶ At the time of writing, Niger is divided administratively into departments, arrondissements, cantons and villages.

Takiéta Joint Forest Management Project

The Takiéta Joint Forest Management Project was set up by SOS Sahel UK in 1995 at the request of the Government of Niger⁷. Its mandate is to promote a process leading to local sustainable decentralised management of the Takiéta Forest Reserve, taking into account all the different user groups.

The project has two main objectives:

1. To create the conditions which will allow the Takiéta Forest Reserve to be managed in a sustainable way by the people who use it; and
2. To identify key elements in a process promoting decentralised natural resource management which can be used to inform similar initiatives elsewhere.

The approach

The orientation, approach and strategies of the project are defined by a number of guiding principles that have evolved over time.

1. Participation and representation

People dependant on a resource are most often the best placed and most rationally motivated managers of that resource and have a right to be involved in its management. Technical packages conceived elsewhere or by 'outsiders' and then grafted onto local situations frequently do not work (even if they are 'technically' sound). Such packages do not 'belong' to the future managers, nor do they necessarily reflect the particular interests and preoccupations of local users/managers (or even know who these local users are). Also the form of management needs to take into account the often diverse production aims of the managers and, most importantly, be understood by them.

Resource management by local people (including non-resident, periodic user groups) is thus a social rather than a technical challenge. It requires a clear definition, from the very start of the process, of what 'participation' means in the

⁷ The project is due to run until October 2000. The total funding available for the project is £715,000 received through joint funding by DFID (Department for International Development – British Government), EU and private sources.

context of decentralised management, and the extent to which it gives full responsibility to local people to manage their resource. Half-way interpretations and measures do not work in the long-term. Local resource management also means that outsiders cannot determine the rhythm of this process.

2. Inclusion

Local communities are not homogenous, but composed of a multitude of socio-political groups with different interests. Each group has its own vision, lobbying power and relationship with the natural resource. Therefore, one must work with everyone in order to ensure that this diversity of interests is reflected in the management of the resource, and that the power dynamics at play are at least recognised by all actors and taken into account.

3. A livelihoods approach

Natural resource management needs to be dealt with in its larger socio-economic context, so that the forest is assessed according to the role it plays in different local production systems. This automatically means the forest is more than just a collection of trees and source of wood. It is a provider of multiple benefits to multiple users.

4. Adaptation

Unpredictable climatic factors (variable in quantity, time and space) and complex vegetation dynamics, both characteristic elements of Sahelian natural resource production, do not permit the luxury of one-off, cyclical management plans (see box 2). Good management under such uncertain circumstances needs to be flexible, evolutionary and based on maximising the benefits to be gained in good years and minimising the negative effects of bad/poor ones (adaptive as opposed to prescriptive management).

A continual process of negotiation is inherent in collaborative or joint management, and the main focus of the project has been to help local people prepare for this.

There have been three main parts to this process:

1. Challenging traditional concepts and behaviour relating to resource management and participation in decision-making processes;
2. Creating new roles and inclusive and representative structures compatible with management objectives for the reserve; and
3. Establishing permanent communications for collaboration and negotiation between actors.

Box 2. Forest management plans in a Sahelian context

Conventional (technical) forest management plans which prescribe policy, procedure and activities often 5-10 years in advance, are not appropriate for local forest management in a Sahelian context because:

- It concerns the management of a multitude of products as opposed to a single or a few products.
- The climatic conditions are highly variable in time and space.
- The productivity of the resources being managed is highly variable over time: some resources, such as woody vegetation being more stable than others.
- It requires consideration of the needs of multiple users.
- The way in which different groups use the resource varies over time and in intensity and this has an enormous impact on the state of the resource at any given moment.

Given that Sahelian climatic conditions are erratic and that there is such a high degree of interplay between production and utilisation (both of which are highly variable), it is difficult to predict what will happen, and what state the resource will be in from one year to another. An adaptive, rather than prescriptive, management tool takes into account the inherent variability of climate, physical production and social requirements.

This adaptive planning tool should contain the following elements:

- A common vision of how the resource should be in the future.
- A knowledge of the state of the resource and resource dynamics.
- The identification and understanding of existing systems of exploitation.
- An understanding of the role that the resource plays in the wider context of different utilisation patterns.
- Rules for the sustainable utilisation of existing resources.
- Identification of opportunities for the improvement of existing resources.
- Identification of new opportunities (products, services).
- An in-built faculty permitting managers to use all information available at a given moment in time to plan for or adapt management activities.

The key factor of this adaptive management is the degree to which forest managers are able to respond flexibly to changing circumstances as they arise. This flexibility has two aspects:

1. Ability to choose not to carry out a particular activity that was planned when information shows that circumstances are no longer appropriate⁸;
2. Ability to act on unforeseen opportunities as they arise⁹.

This means that while always moving towards the 'common vision of the future', the managers of the forest respond in order to limit losses and exploit opportunities as and when they occur.

8 For instance an area which has been set aside may have to be opened up earlier than anticipated to take into account higher than normal livestock pressures in the forest reserve due to erratic rain in the north.

9 For instance, good rains elsewhere with consequent reduced pressure on the forest may allow hay making to occur.

Getting started

4

The project officially started in April 1995. However, before broaching the subject of the resource and its future management, it was necessary to clarify and resolve the problems of encroachment, illegal habitation and agricultural exploitation and to introduce the idea and implications of local management to all stakeholders.

Re-defining forest boundaries

Re-establishing and demarcating the borders of the forest reserve where they were no longer visible was necessary to clarify the area to be managed. This involved re-measuring, re-verifying and placing boundary markers where they were missing, as well as making certain borders clearer through planting fast-growing exotic species (*Prosopis juliflora*). This was particularly important in two areas:

- The border between the forest and Takiéta village. The village had gradually encroached into 40ha of the forest and a new delimitation granting 87ha of land to Takiéta village was negotiated and formally agreed with the local authorities.
- Physical repossession of fields encroaching illegally along the southern boundary of the forest and planting (1995-1996) another fast-growing exotic (*Acacia holosericea*).

Resolving the problem of illegal settlement

The Takiéta Forest was classified as a reserve¹⁰ in 1950. However, during the long bureaucratic process of its establishment, seven families were given the right to use a total area of 40ha within the forest. The exact location of this area was left unspecified, as was the nature of the agreed 'use'.

From 1950 to 1995, the government authorities and intervening projects chose to ignore the growing population living in and exploiting the Forest Reserve. A study carried out by the project in 1995 showed that the original seven families had become forty-one, cultivating forty-four fields scattered to the south and centre of

¹⁰ Reservation means that the area is subject to official government regulations which accord only traditional usufruct rights and access through the forest to local populations. In reality, the effect of reservation has been to create a 'management void' in that local management responsibility is invalidated without, in the majority of cases, replacing it with any alternative form of management. The filling of this void in the context of decentralisation is the *raison d'être* of the project.

the Forest Reserve representing an area of 384ha (6% of the forest). Of these, nineteen families were descendants of the original seven families and twenty-two families had come from elsewhere.

Resolving the issue of the illegal settlement was a sensitive socio-political problem. The project used a highly participatory approach, which contributed to the success of the process.

1. A study was carried out in early 1995 (before the project officially began) to identify the different families living in the forest reserve and how they had arrived. In addition it identified all the fields and (where possible) to whom they belonged.
2. One hundred and eighty people participated in a workshop (April 1995) including representatives from all known interest groups (chiefs, local and regional authorities, pastoral groups, technical services). During this workshop the findings of the study were presented and participants discussed the future of the forest reserve in terms of the prevailing trends and the likely consequences for all concerned. The workshop made the following recommendations:
 - All families from the forest reserve regarded as non-resident should be removed (non-resident had been specified as being people who had no ties with the original 7 families or people who had arrived after 1986).
 - Residents could stay in the forest reserve provided that they accepted that settlements would be grouped together in one village; land would be redistributed among all the resident families¹¹ in one area locally already known as Kasa da Ruwa; the limits of these redistributed fields would be physically marked; and all residents would sign a cultivation contract.
 - A committee should be created to follow up on the above two recommendations (created by regional decree on 5/5/95).
3. The committee (to which the project was designated as an 'advisor') waited until early 1996 to carry out the above recommendations, as by April 1995 people had already started preparing their fields. Surprisingly, non-residents left of their own accord; the agreement that they should go was unanimous and they had no one to turn to for political support.

¹¹ For each person including babies in the womb an area of 0.7ha was allocated for fields. This figure was calculated taking into account local indexes for viable farm sizes in the arrondissements of Mirriah and Matamaye and then nearly doubling them. In addition, the new village of Kasa da Ruwa included not only dwellings and community space for the existing population, but also space for projected future needs in terms of dwellings and infrastructure. The areas formally put aside are regarded as finite and non negotiable.

4. The grouping together of Kasa da Ruwa village, the redistribution and delimitation of land and the signing of cultivation contracts was very sensitively carried out by the Forest Department in close collaboration with the residents so that the residents themselves chose the sites for the village and the fields. As a result, by June 1996 Kasa da Ruwa village was set up with its surrounding fields in one location in the forest. Since that time, no problems have occurred and the population at Kasa da Ruwa live and work in greater security and are now a locally 'recognised' social entity.

Starting a dialogue

An initial period of dialogue was needed for local resource users as well as other stakeholders (traditional and administrative authorities, government services), prior to them considering the idea of a decentralised management system for the forest reserve.

In the first place, local people (agricultural and pastoral) rightly regarded the forest reserve as a government domain where normally they had neither rights nor the responsibility to decide on its future. Time was needed for them to believe that they were now actually being asked to decide on their own future. In other words, the Forest Department, through the project, was asking forest users to become active decision-makers instead of passive recipients of top-down decisions.

Government technical services and other regional and local authorities equally needed (and still need) time to accept the idea of real decentralised management by local people. Decentralised management is especially difficult for many authorities who perceive their power and authority as being undermined and their new role being unclear and often unwelcome.

Initially the state and local people had extremely negative pre-conceived ideas of what the other stood for. By facilitating information exchange, talking to each other on equal terms, and encouraging a process of shared analysis by all concerned on their changing roles and the new challenges now facing them in the context of decentralised natural resource management, a mutual respect was engendered which has resulted in a more positive attitude towards each other and the recognition of the 'win-win' long-term potential for all concerned.

Secondly, local people's perceptions of the concept of participation were very different to that of the project. They were used to a 'top-down approach' where decisions were made by outsiders (projects, government technical services, local authorities). Their only recent experience of 'participation' in natural resource management was being paid Food For Work to provide labour for interventions defined by a previous project (the Forest and Land Use

Planning, or FLUP¹² Project). Decentralised local management would demand a different idea of 'participation' and 'representation' and skills for scene-setting, analysis and consensual decision-making/negotiation at community level¹³.

Finally, it was necessary to introduce and discuss the idea of decentralised natural resource management: what it means, why it is being promoted by the State and the stakes and opportunities it presents for the local population.

Over the first eighteen months, the project therefore undertook a number of activities in order to create a favourable environment in which to discuss and prepare for the future management of the forest reserve. These included:

- Identifying and establishing contact between the different user-groups and the project.
- Identifying, analysing and having a better understanding (for everyone) of local production systems and preoccupations through a series of participatory studies (using PRA).
- Supporting local initiatives through a participatory planning process.
- Facilitating regular discussions (formal and informal) among local traditional authorities and local government services (over and above the seconded forest department/project staff).
- Thematic analysis and discussion at village and camp level which put the management of the Takiéta Forest Reserve in a broader context (described in more detail below).

Deciding on the future of the Forest Reserve

Once a greater understanding of the stakes and opportunities presented by decentralised natural resource management was reached, the project facilitated a series of thematic discussions, during which all the actors concerned were asked what the future of the Forest Reserve should be. Though the subject had been approached obliquely, this direct question had not been posed earlier as it was feared that people would say what they thought the project wanted to hear.

With the advent of decentralisation¹⁴, local people would not only have the rights actively to manage their own resources, they would also be required to accept the associated responsibilities. Therefore, a basic calculation needed to be made by

12 The Forest and Land Use Planning Project (FLUP) was a national project funded by USAID which started in July 1980 and ended in 1989. The project focused on improving degraded parts of the forest (about 500ha total over 5 years) through soil and water conservation measures and tree planting, all on a Food for Work basis. It also carried out an inventory of the forest.

13 Although such planning processes take time, the fruits of the investment influenced later work very positively.

14 While decentralisation as a political process may take time to be implemented, the very fact that the process has started means that the environment is conducive to practical initiatives such as the TJFMP which can give concrete lessons on how to transfer power and responsibility physically back to local people.

each group to weigh the 'costs' of management (in terms of management responsibilities, time and effort) against the 'gains' (perceived benefits of improved, local management). See box 3.

Box 3. The Cost of managing

There are two aspects of any resource management system:

- Managing the rational use of existing resources.
- Improving the quality or quantity of these resources.

There are costs associated with the operation of even the most simple system of management. This is because there needs to be a structure in place to implement the system. The first financial obligation of management is thus to meet the running costs of the Local Management Structure (LMS). Any income generated over and above this is technically available for re-investment to develop the resource.

In the case of a low value resource such as Takiéta, to arrive at a situation where the resource is being managed rationally, is already to be doing very well.

The generation of additional funds for investment in the development of the resource opens up further opportunities. However, if we refer to the context in which this management is taking place (high variability, etc.) all investments are potentially high-risk. Given limited financial resources it makes sense for local managers to err on the side of caution and to adopt a policy of risk spreading when considering development activities. The feasibility of development activities proposed will therefore be based on the cost relative to finances available and an estimate of the risks involved.

Underlying any decision to manage is the cost of not managing. Taking the example of Takiéta, the resource itself is not rich and will never generate a great deal of income. Despite this, local people decided to organise themselves for management in order to avoid the hidden cost of losing the resource altogether.

In order that each interest group decides for itself whether or not it was worthwhile investing in the process of collaborative management (and if so, at what level), a series of three-day mini-workshops were held in fifteen villages and also in a modified form with the representatives of thirty-five pastoral communities. Four initial themes were discussed to analyse the relative value of the resource and its continued existence. These were:

1. The Evolution of the Forest: trends in physical terms and forms of exploitation; the roles and relative authority and power of different stakeholders and users during three distinct periods (Pre-Colonial, Colonial and Post-Colonial).

2. The Policy of Decentralisation: decentralisation in general and of natural resource management in particular; the logic for the changes that would take place.
3. Local Management: what it would and could mean in the new context.
4. The Forest Reserve: the nature and importance of people's relationship with the forest and their role in its future management along with the other actors identified.

Participants were then asked: *'Do you think it's worth becoming involved in the management of this resource?'* and, in the case of a positive response, discussions continued regarding:

- Rights and responsibilities: the possible rights and responsibilities of different stakeholders and what they should/could be.
- Brainstorming for people's ideas concerning what they imagined the act of 'managing' the resource to imply in terms of actions/activities.
- Hopes, Fears, Reservations that people could identify concerning the concept of local management.

Workshop discussions were held first in separate groups (men, women, youth) and then in plenary. Overall, these workshops took nine months to complete.

The project collated all the ideas raised by all the groups and sub-groups of stakeholders and, without comment, selection or omission, fed back a synthesis of all the ideas under thematic headings to each community. This gave everyone involved a broader idea of local resident and non-resident opinions on the matter.

Though there were certain divergent opinions, there was no clear differentiation between ideas coming from agricultural or pastoral-based populations; rather, a great deal of consensus on subjects as diverse as whether or not to divide the forest up into sections and how to finance the management in the future.

Once this thematic synthesis of initial (non-attributed) ideas had been fed back to all the people concerned, a major workshop was held in May 1997, during which all the issues raised were discussed and a consensus reached on the necessity and nature of the next step forward. The participants, totalling about two-hundred people, included men and women representing all known resident and non-resident forest users as well as pastoral associations, local, administrative and traditional authorities and government services.

At the end of the main workshop, participants (working in groups and plenary) decided unanimously that it was worth managing the forest and that it should remain as one unit¹⁵.

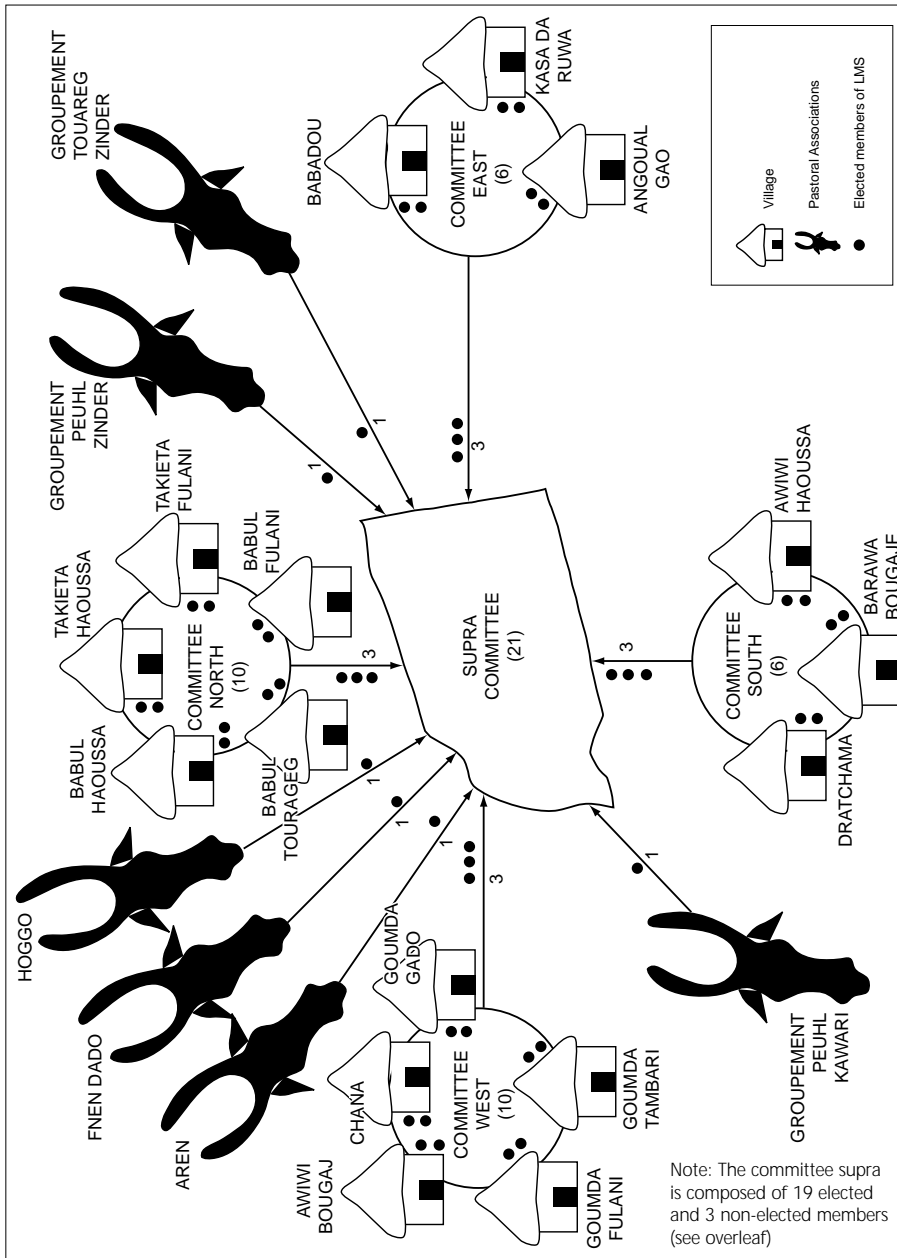
The participants proposed a management structure, consisting of a supra-committee and four sub-committees. The supra-committee would include representatives of non-resident groups and pastoral associations, all villages and government departments, while only the residents of the villages and hamlets surrounding the forest reserve would be represented in the sub-committees. The non-resident pastoral users preferred to be only represented in the supra-committee. This gave them a place in the policy-making body without necessarily being part of the day to day management as they could not always be present. The project was delegated to draw up a draft local management structure (consisting of the supra-committee and sub-committees) for subsequent amendment by all stakeholders.

Finally, it was agreed that in future all resources should be paid for by the users so as to contribute to the costs of managing the forest.

¹⁵ It is interesting to note here that the initial school of thought (expressed during the mini-workshops before the large workshop) for many sedentary users was that it would be best to break up the forest reserve into 'village' units. However after a few weeks of consideration, all villagers had changed their mind as they realised that:

- Farming would probably start to take place in the unit and the influential/rich people would most likely be the ones to benefit from this.
- The value of the forest was as a whole and not distinct units.

Figure 2: The Local Management Structure



5 Creation of a Local Management Structure

Reaching popular consensus on the LMS

Consulting with as many people as possible on the LMS proposed by participants of the May 1997 workshop was essential if it was to become a legitimate and representative structure and consensus on its final form was to be reached. How long this would take was uncertain.

A first draft proposal was produced, circulated, discussed and later modified in the light of proposals made by each user-group. This process of consultation continued over a period of six months, producing a total of three successive drafts, each one narrowing down the divergence of opinions to what was finally a small number of key points.

In May 1998, another large workshop was held. Representatives of all the groups concerned (as before), together with others who had been presented or had presented themselves for inclusion in the discussions, debated the remaining contentious points, and agreed upon the final form and composition of the local management structure (LMS).

In addition, the workshop participants decided on a number of general principles for the LMS:

- 50% of all village representatives need to be women¹⁶.
- At least one woman from each sub-committee needed to be elected to the supra-committee.
- Democratic elections by secret ballot were required to elect all candidates at all levels.

The structure consists of four village sub-committees and a supra-committee. The sub-committees are made up of two elected village members (men and women)

¹⁶ From the outset, the project had taken care to address men and women equally and where necessary separately, in all discussions. Women's presence throughout the different steps of the decision-making process was viewed therefore as logical and necessary by all concerned. The subject of women's role and representation was raised and discussed at the workshop so that a consensual decision could be made and official statute created (institutionalisation).

from three to five villages. Villages were grouped according to geographical location and social affinity. Three members of each sub-committee are selected to be delegates to the supra-committee, which also includes representatives of pastoral communities, pastoral associations and three non-voting advisory members. The advisory members are representatives of the Forest and Livestock Production Departments and the project and their membership is regarded as temporary (5 years for the Government services¹⁷).

Elections for the candidates by villages, pastoral groups and associations took place between July and November 1998. The structure is shown in figure 2 (see page 20).

The LMS prepares itself to manage the forest reserve

The creation of the Local Management Structure (LMS) in itself did not signify the start of local management of the forest, but the start of a process towards it. This new and rather complex structure, once in place would need to be able to organise and manage itself if it was to be capable of managing the resource.

The LMS was the product of consensus, negotiation as well as local people's imagination and common sense. Therefore, at least initially, all forty-one members were involved in the conceptual and organisational aspects governing the new structure, so as to share a common level of understanding and information. The project also followed a strategy by which the group defined their own logical learning process, dealing with issues as they arose.

One of the earliest themes for discussion was the limited life span of the project and how best to manage the remaining time available so that the LMS would be as established and organised as possible before the project withdrew. A process-line, starting from the creation of the LMS up until the desired situation at the project exit point, was used to identify four broad priority areas. These were:

- Making sure that the LMS was organised and functional.
- Getting to know the resource, its users and its dynamics.
- Improving and reinforcing mechanisms for communications (populations, authorities, state etc.).
- Networking, gaining skills and making contacts for the future.

All the activities undertaken by the LMS in the following months essentially dealt with these aspects in preparation for the departure of the project.

¹⁷ After the initial debate about whether the Government services should be part of the structure at all, the May 1997 workshop decided that the representatives should be included as non-voting advisory members for a period of five years so as to ensure good communications and sustained State interest. This decision was a compromise between people's fear of being abandoned straight away with the sole responsibility for management before they were ready and the strong possibility that the service members would try to 'run the show'.

The different stages of the process undertaken from the first LMS meetings up until the time of writing are discussed in a more or less chronological order below.

Setting up a working structure (November 1998 to April 1999)

This can be broken down into six main stages

1. Reaching a common point of view and level of mutual respect

The representatives who had been elected from the different groups (both resident and non-resident) had diverse perceptions and ideas of what 'management' might entail and their exact role in the process¹⁸. In addition, 'agricultural' villages include significant populations from pastoral backgrounds (Babul Fulani, Babul Touareg, Goumda Fulani, Goumda Tambari, and Takiéta Fulani) who have different traditional leadership structures. The first meetings of the four sub-committees and the supra committee therefore aimed to:

- Introduce fellow members to the concept of Group Dynamics, the need for mutual respect and communication¹⁹ and methods to ensure them.
- Identify a common vision of what the LMS was (or should be) aiming for.
- Identify, from the beginning, the reasons pushing the population and the individuals elected to become involved in the management of the resource and their fears or reservations concerning this future management.

The results of these separate discussions were synthesised during a five-day meeting of all the members of the structure. Through a process of group work, plenary sessions, debate and final synthesis the members also discussed:

- The LMS and the roles, relations, responsibilities and consolidation of mutual support among the three elements of the structure (Population - Sub-Committee - Supra Committee).
- The LMS's knowledge of the resource that it was created to manage (see Getting to know the resource, page 25).
- A common definition of what the management of the forest reserve was likely to entail.

2. Election of people to posts within the LMS

Representatives for the LMS had been elected by villagers, pastoral groups and associations from July to November 1998. Once elected, each sub-committee

¹⁸ It should be noted that despite the diversity of the groups involved, everyone had the same idea of the value of the forest being primarily that of a pastoral resource. Therefore, from the beginning there was no direct conflict of interests concerning its future use.

¹⁹ This was a reaffirmation of a consensual decision making process that had been taking place since the very first discussions with actors. This is to say that there has never been a 'right/wrong, majority vote' scenario. Rather it is generally accepted that people have different opinions that can be satisfactorily resolved through discussion and consensus.

decided on its own structure (President, Treasurer, Secretary etc.) and elected people for each post; including the three delegates chosen to represent it in the supra-committee. Once this had been completed, it was possible for the supra-committee to meet for the first time, bringing newly elected sub-committee members together with pastoral representatives and associations and advisory members. The supra-committee also had to decide on the different posts it needed within its structure (with the possibility of later modification) and the criteria for the selection of candidates prior to elections being held.

3. Official presentation of the LMS to the authorities

In December 1998, the LMS (Supra-committee and four Sub-committees) was officially presented to all known²⁰ administrative and traditional authorities from village and camp chiefs to the Prefet of Zinder²¹. This formal presentation gave the LMS an official seal of approval and legitimacy in the combined presence of all local political actors capable of aiding or hampering its activities in the future. In addition, being officially recognised as an authority in front of the others reassured LMS representatives of their mandate and legitimacy.

4. Clarifying roles and responsibilities with the LMS

Although elections had already taken place at different levels in the structure, everyone within the LMS needed to be clear on the roles and responsibilities of the different posts. A special workshop was held to discuss the issue and it was agreed by all (in front of all) what each post should entail.

5. Drawing-up and agreeing the bylaws of the LMS

The forty-one members of the LMS needed to work out and agree on the rules confirming the official existence of the LMS. This included deciding on a name (“ Ku Tayani” , representing the forest crying out for help); objectives; the conditions of membership; relations with partners and the state; resources (financial and physical); sanctions; the conditions for its dissolution, and final dispositions. A draft document was subsequently produced in Hausa²² and French clearly laying down all the rules.

6. Drawing-up and agreeing internal policies and procedures for the LMS

A commission from within the LMS, consisting of selected members and experienced local resource people, drew up rules to complement the bylaws and provide more detail on conditions of membership, rights and obligations of members, committee structure, its physical and financial resources, its penalties

²⁰ Throughout the process it is always possible that previously unidentified actors/interested parties come to light.

²¹ Equivalent to a regional Governor.

²² This document and all subsequent documents produced by the LMS go through a process of discussion and amendment by all the actors before being finally adopted.

and its dissolution. Later this commission presented the results of its deliberations to the rest of the LMS members for discussion, amendment and agreement. A draft document was produced in Hausa and French for further discussion and amendment by all concerned.

Getting to know the resource (November 1998 to March 1999)

If the local people are to be the future managers of the resource, they need to be actively and fully involved in all aspects of its management, through their LMS. This includes defining the nature of the resources to be managed and their approximate value (e.g. making an inventory). The LMS is composed of forest users who, collectively, have detailed knowledge of the resources. Information generated and collected from local sources has the advantage of being in a form immediately accessible and pertinent to the new managers. It also tends to be far richer in quality and quantity than one-off, classical (often 'single-product') technical studies and inventories carried out by outsiders or strangers to the zone.

The process of the LMS getting to know the forest resource started by sharing and collating what people knew already and subsequently evolved into a number of 'stages' described below.

1. The current state of knowledge concerning the Forest Reserve

This subject was broached during one and a half days of the very first LMS meeting, using participatory mapping techniques. The members of the LMS split into four mixed groups (men, women, residents, non-residents, pastoral, non-pastoral) each with a mandate to note down:

- i) the main orientation points within the forest.
- ii) the different resources and products; their location and quality, different uses of these resources etc.

All this information was presented on the map or noted by the group secretaries.

Once the four maps had been completed, they were each presented in plenary. The differences between the maps were negligible²³ and largely related to the position and orientation of features such as hills and dry stream-beds and different degrees of precision concerning the quality of certain resources. This exercise facilitated the elaboration of the first baseline map and separate draft versions of pasture, forest and soils maps (described below).

²³ These first maps, though created from the collective memory/knowledge of mixed groups (some of the members of which had never met before) were remarkably similar: underlining the quality and intimate knowledge of local people about their own resources.

During this initial mapping process there were some difficulties to begin with for those unfamiliar with the technique of mapping or visual representation. However, once they were given clear explanations, enough time and the liberty to choose their own codes and orientation methods the difficulties were overcome.

Mapping was a good starting activity in that it not only generated and allowed the sharing of very useful information, but it also promoted active participation, with everyone having something to contribute.

2. Compilation of a baseline map

Prior to carrying out an inventory, the LMS decided that a baseline map depicting the physical features of the forest should be made. This involved field visits to compare the information from first sketch maps and old aerial photographs with what actually exists on the ground using distance measurement between orientation points. This exercise took ten members of the LMS (men and women) four days to complete²⁴. Two base maps were produced at a scale of 1:5,000 and 1:50,000, positioning roads, hills, lakes, streams, dunes (all stable), quarries and the agricultural area of the forest reserve. The baseline map is reproduced in figure 3 (see right).

3. Inventory of soils, pasture, trees

A team of eight people (men and women) from the LMS carried out soil, pasture and tree inventories.

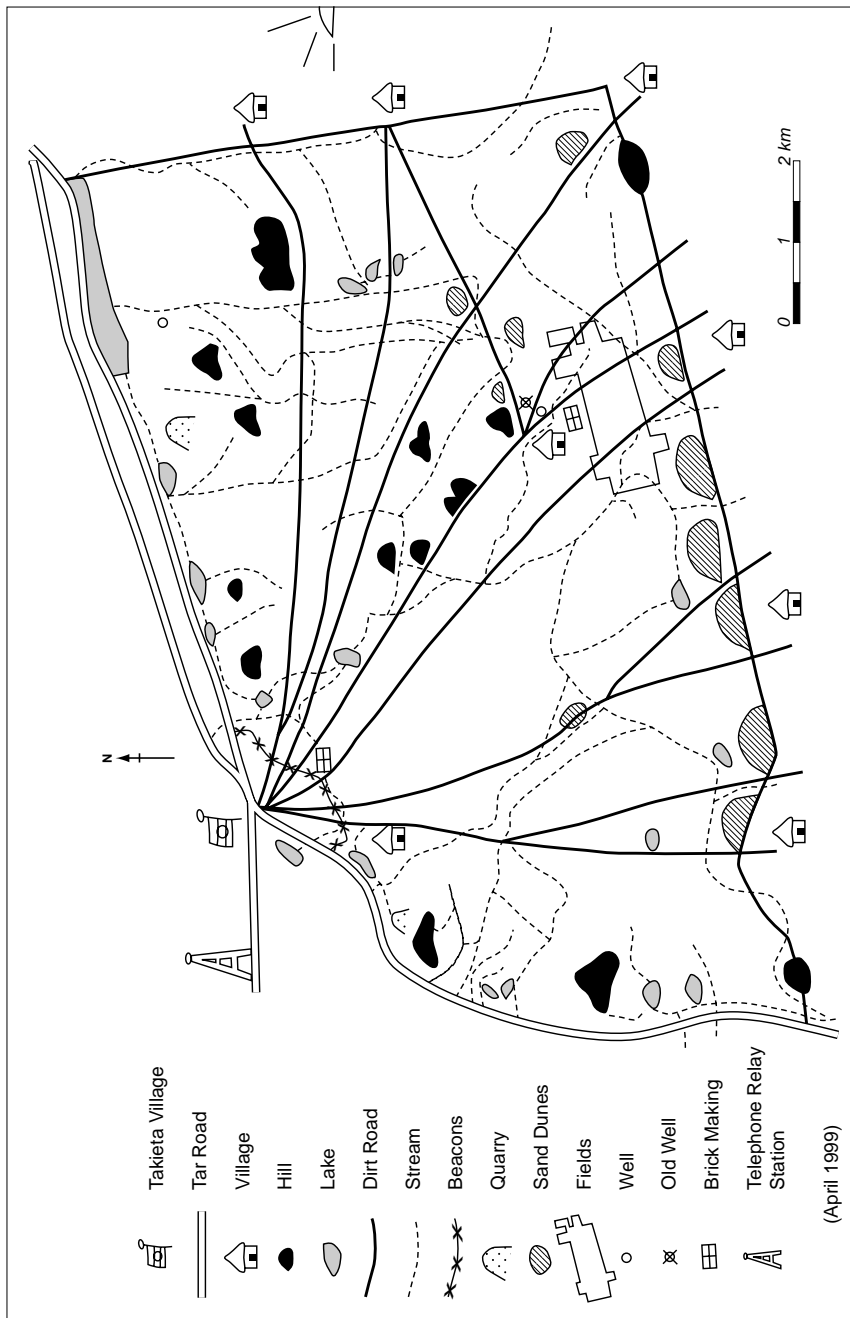
The team took two days of preparation for deciding on the elements to be inventoried, the working methodology and the initial classification for soils, pasture and trees.

This was followed by eight days in the field mapping the different elements according to the different classifications. To carry out the work, the team split the forest into a series of blocks, delimited by roads. In each block advantage was taken of any natural rises, hillocks or hills to observe the strata. In addition, the team moved over the blocks in a sinusoidal fashion so as to cover the whole area. Four teams of two people were each responsible for one of either pasture, soils, trees or a re-verification of the baseline-map. In addition a qualitative survey of wildlife was undertaken. Although each team was responsible for a certain resource, collaboration was encouraged in order to enrich findings.

Finally, the team spent two-three days reproducing information on new maps at a scale of 1:50000 and 1:5000.

²⁴ All maps tend to be progressively amended as more information enables greater precision. Therefore, each map represents the state of knowledge at a given time.

Figure 3: Base Map Takiéta Forest Reserve



The three resource maps are reproduced in figures 4-6 (page 29, 30 and 31). It should be noted that with the pasture and woody vegetation maps all species were identified for each class. Table 1 shows the classifications used for the pasture map as an example:

Class names (Ref. map)	Dominant species
Abundant and good quality	<i>Cenchrus biflorus</i> , <i>Andropogon gayanus</i> , <i>Schizachyrium exile</i>
Good quality but not much	<i>Dactyloctenium aegyptium</i> , <i>Zornia glochidata</i> , <i>Pennisetum pedicellatum</i> , <i>Brachiara ramosa</i>
Abundant but medium quality	<i>Tripogon minimus</i> , <i>Aristida mutabilis</i>
No pasture	<i>Sida cordifolia</i> , <i>Cassia occidentalis</i> , <i>Tribulus terrestris</i>
Good quality and medium quantity	<i>Cenchrus biflorus</i> , <i>Zornia glochidata</i> , <i>Cassia occidentalis</i> , <i>Chrozophora brochiana</i>
Very little pasture	<i>Cenchrus biflorus</i> , <i>Sida cordifolia</i> , <i>Aristida mutabilis</i> , <i>Dactyloctenium aegyptium</i> , <i>Brachiara ramosa</i>

Sharing experiences with others (February 1999 onwards)

There are few examples of successful multi-use, decentralised natural forest resource management systems in Niger (and probably in the Sahel). Those examples that do exist, however, provide important lessons even though they may have been created at different times and by projects with different objectives and methods.

In order to capitalise on the valuable information and personal experiences of other LMSs, twelve resource people from four local management bodies (Guesselbodi, Baban Rafi, Gorou Bassounga, Gaya²⁵), two of which were no longer operational, were invited to Takiéta for a week. These resource people formed an 'external commission', first sharing experiences amongst its own members and identifying key themes to discuss with the LMS. This was followed by three days of very rich thematic discussion directly between the LMS and the resource people.

25 Guesselbodi Wood Co-operative created by the Forest Land Use and Planning Project, funded by USAID; Baban Rafi Rural Fuelwood Market created by CARE using Energy II model for Marches Ruraux de Bois.; Gorou Bassounga Forest Management Co-operative, created by Lutheran World Relief under USAID funding using Guesselbodi model; Gaya, a Swiss funded rural development project (PAIGLR) based on management of village land and natural stands of *Borassus* palm.

Figure 4: Soils Map

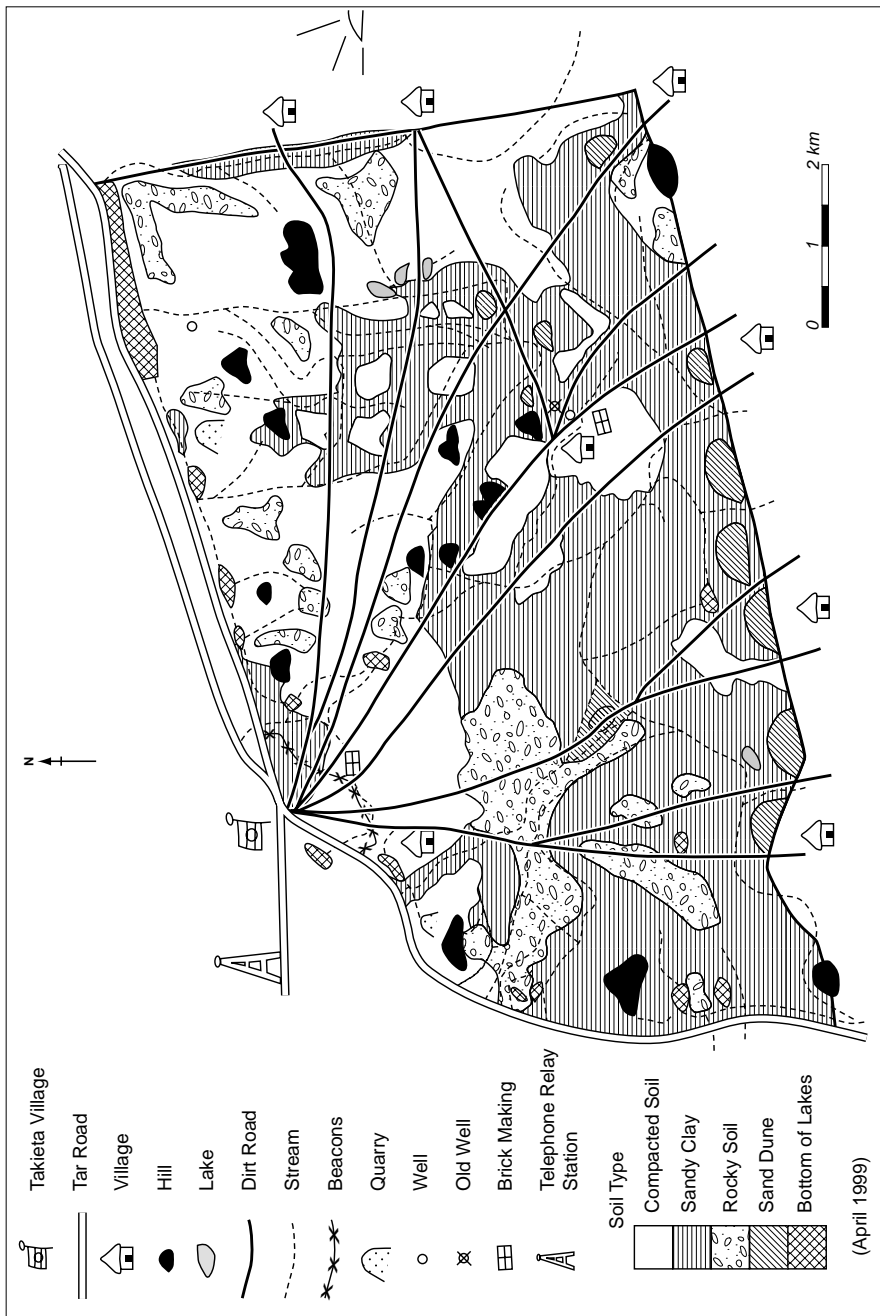


Figure 5: Pasture Map

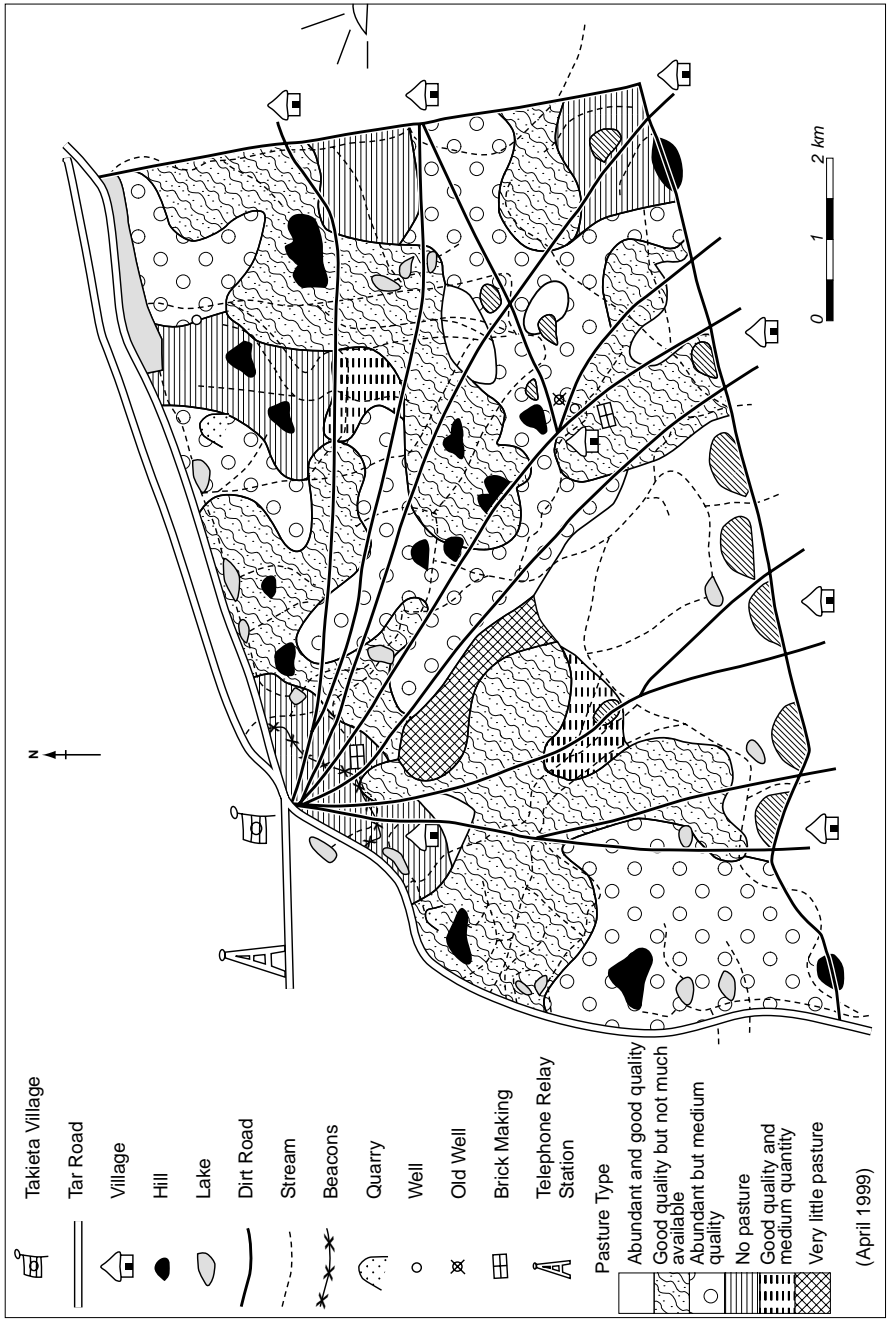
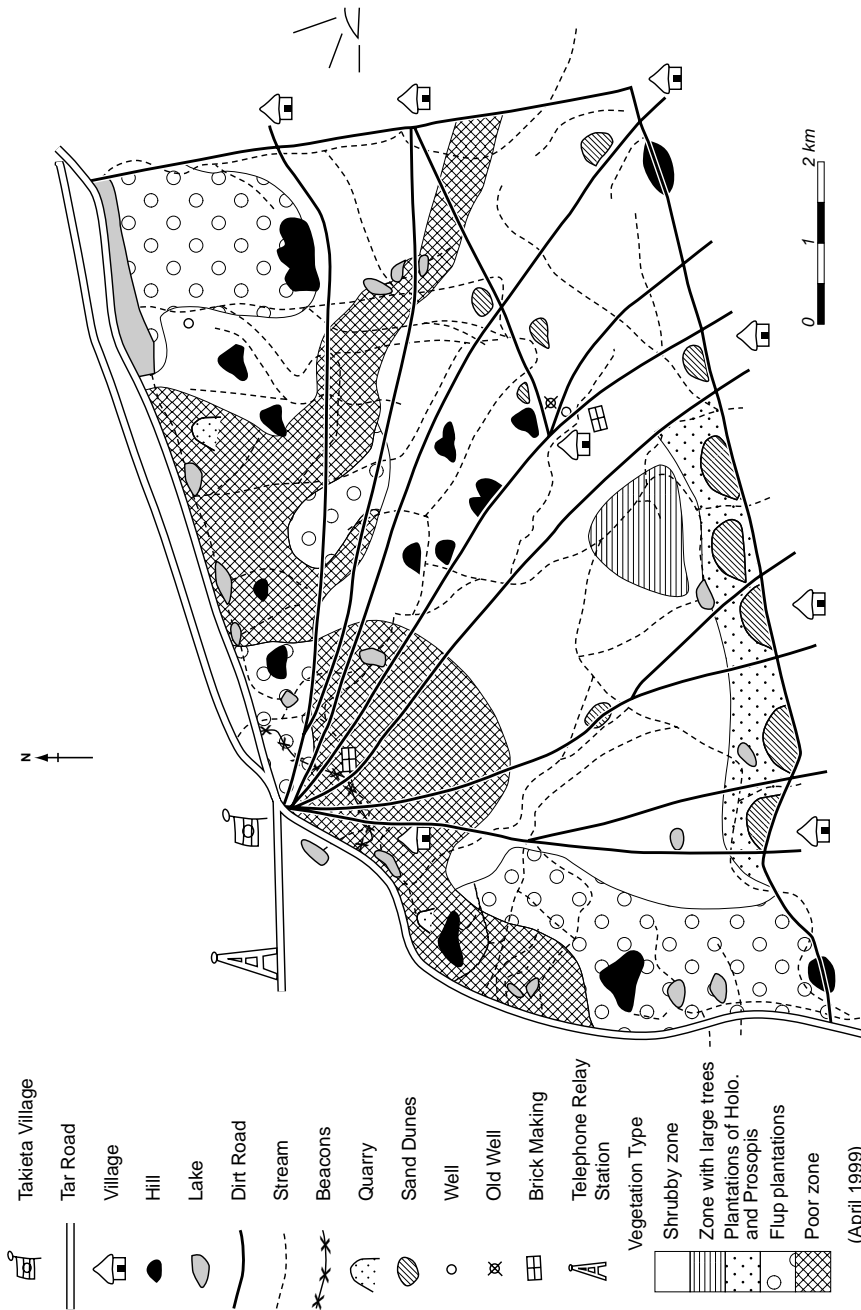


Figure 6: Vegetation Map



The experience was very beneficial for all concerned²⁶. From the point of view of the LMS, it was able to:

- Work directly with people who were on the same wavelength and who already had some practical experience.
- See how others could analyse frankly the strengths and weaknesses of their situations and see how relatively well-placed they were.
- Learn from the experiences of others and understand and be prepared for potential traps and problems.

Ensuring good communication (November 1998 onwards)

Ensuring that the LMS does not exist as a decision-making body in a vacuum but has the support of the people they represent, was a key concern shared by the LMS, local people and the project. From the very first meeting, relations between the three essential parts of the structure - **Population - Sub-committees - Supra-committee** - were discussed. A series of strategies were identified and implemented by the LMS, largely based on the necessity for regular two-way communication:

- The LMS needs to be in contact and have relations with all the different users and other stakeholders involved, either directly through delegates within the structure or through regular formal and informal contacts and exchanges.
- Delegates to the LMS should act as a two-way conduit of information between the population and the structure.
- The LMS representatives, particularly supra-committee members, also need to present themselves from time to time at the community level to:
 - Ensure that communication systems are functioning well;
 - Gauge public opinion about the LMS and create an environment of accountability and transparency; and
 - Stimulate interest and support the delegates in their task.

In order to be effective in their role, delegates must regularly and faithfully feed back information about what the LMS is doing or proposing to the population for discussion and suggestions. These can then be transmitted back to the LMS for consideration and incorporation. In order both to report feedback and supply information, the delegates must all be capable of understanding what takes place during meetings, retaining the information and being able to share it with others later.

Effective communication also relies on the interest on the part of the population in what is happening to the extent to which it not only facilitates feedback and

²⁶ Another unexpected bonus of sharing experiences is that some projects (notably co-operative members of Guesselbodi Forest Reserve) were able to analyse for the first time why their project has failed and how it might be made to work in the future.

discussion by the delegates but also insists on regular quality communication. However, communities may differ substantially in collective 'personality', social cohesion, interest and motivation. A community 'delegate' to the LMS may want and be capable of playing the role requested but if the community lacks sufficient interest or leadership it will not always be easy to ensure that the necessary quality or frequency of feedback takes place.

The LMS has responded to the many facets of this communication challenge through a series of activities:

- Direct Supra-committee contact with all stakeholders (in Niger and Nigeria) including those not represented directly in the LMS but who wish to remain informed of what is happening and who might wish to make an input into the management process.
- Discussion and information sharing about the effectiveness of delegates in carrying out their tasks in order to identify problem areas, personal difficulties, share useful techniques and strategies and give moral support.
- Ensuring that proceedings are written up by the secretaries of all the committees at the end of each meeting, as well as carrying out an internal evaluation of what members have retained from each session. This is done through random questioning and then summarising the key points to be retained by the General Secretary.
- The holding of regular LMS - population and stakeholder follow-up meetings to discuss a range of issues including: work progress and future perspectives; the level of interest shown by the population in what they are doing; and the effectiveness of the communication systems. These meetings are also used to stress the rights and responsibilities of all concerned to demand accountability from the LMS, and to monitor the function of the delegates.
- The use of local radio for passing information, invitations, progress reports, interviews etc.

Establishing rules for forest use (December 1998 onwards)

The process used to establish rules can be broken down into four stages.

1. Identifying the users

In December 1998 the LMS made an initial list of all the users of the forest. This list was later re-verified and extended during May and June 1999. In total, twenty-two user-groups were identified, each exploiting the forest reserve in a unique way²⁷. It came as a surprise for many (particularly local authorities and government services)

²⁷ Users include local livestock herders, non-local livestock herders, wood-sellers, bed-makers, wood-carvers, charcoal-makers, traditional doctors, well-diggers, grain-store and house constructors, wood-users for domestic consumption, collectors of fruits and leaves, hunters, brick-makers, straw-collectors, agriculturalists at Kasa da Ruwa, fishermen, gravel-users, water-users, market-gardeners, monkey trainers and snake charmers, bee-keepers, tourists, inhabitants of the forest reserve.

that such a 'poor resource' could have so many users and it definitely showed the advantage of 'users' identifying 'users'.

2. Analysis

A detailed analysis, including that of sustainability, was made of each of the twenty-two types of exploitation looking at the way that each product was being harvested and utilised. The main questions the LMS asked were:

- How does each user use the resource?
- Should the present form of utilisation continue as it is (is it sustainable?), should it be modified (can it be done in a better way?) or should it be stopped (is it detrimental to the forest reserve?)?
- If necessary, how should the use be modified?

3. Making rules

Following this analysis, a first draft of the rules was drawn up (completed in June 1999) defining all permissible forms of forest use. The LMS aimed to make the rules as simple and comprehensive as possible so as to avoid any ambiguity in the future, and all known products were mentioned and legislated for.

It is important to note that the rules drafted were the result of local user identification and analysis and do not necessarily relate to existing forest legislation. Although there were no major contradictions between the local rules and national legislation, the Forest Department assured the LMS that, as managers, they had the right to make those rules they felt most appropriate to manage the area under their jurisdiction. For example, the LMS could decide how much and for what price wood should be sold from the forest. However, once sold, wood merchants would be liable to pay the wood transport taxes applicable in the national legislation.

4. Asking for feedback from the users

Copies of the draft document were presented to all concerned actors and communities (October 1999), either directly by the sub committees in the case of the villages or by a small delegation from the supra-committee in the case of non-resident (and distant) pastoral groups, government services and pastoral associations. Timing was very important as the agricultural season was underway and the pastoral groups were already on transhumance.

Each group had a period of three to four weeks in which to consider the contents of the draft document and make their corrections, observations and/or proposals, either through their LMS delegate, group chiefs, or traditional leaders. After the deadline, the LMS collated the feedback from all the different sources²⁸ and

²⁸ It is interesting to note that nearly all sources sent back comments. Whilst none proposed major changes to the document, it does show the high level of interest that has been engendered within all user groups.

undertook a thorough review of the draft document, clause by clause. Text was re-written where it was ambiguous, prices were re-set (taking the average where there was a range of suggestions), and specific points were either incorporated, rejected or retained for further discussion. At this point, the document was still considered as a draft. The LMS strongly felt that it could only be adopted after having been presented, discussed and amended by community representatives, traditional and modern administrative authorities, associations and government services at a workshop to be held in early December 1999.

5. Workshop for the adoption of the management document

The LMS, with the help of the project, organised a workshop (December 1999) at which over 250 participants worked in groups and in plenary to discuss, decide upon and finally adopt the Management Document. Previously unresolved issues were voted on during a general assembly and in several cases prices were actually raised. The Livestock Production Service was asked and agreed to adapt its strategy towards livestock vaccination in order to fall more in line with the LMS and the needs of transhumant and sedentary livestock herders/owners.

The adopted document will be translated into Fulfulde and Tamachek²⁹ in addition to the existing Hausa and French versions, with a view to widely distributing copies for all those concerned. Radio will also be used for broadcasting this information.

Management starts

Hands on management of the Takiéta Forest Reserve by the LMS begins in January 2000.

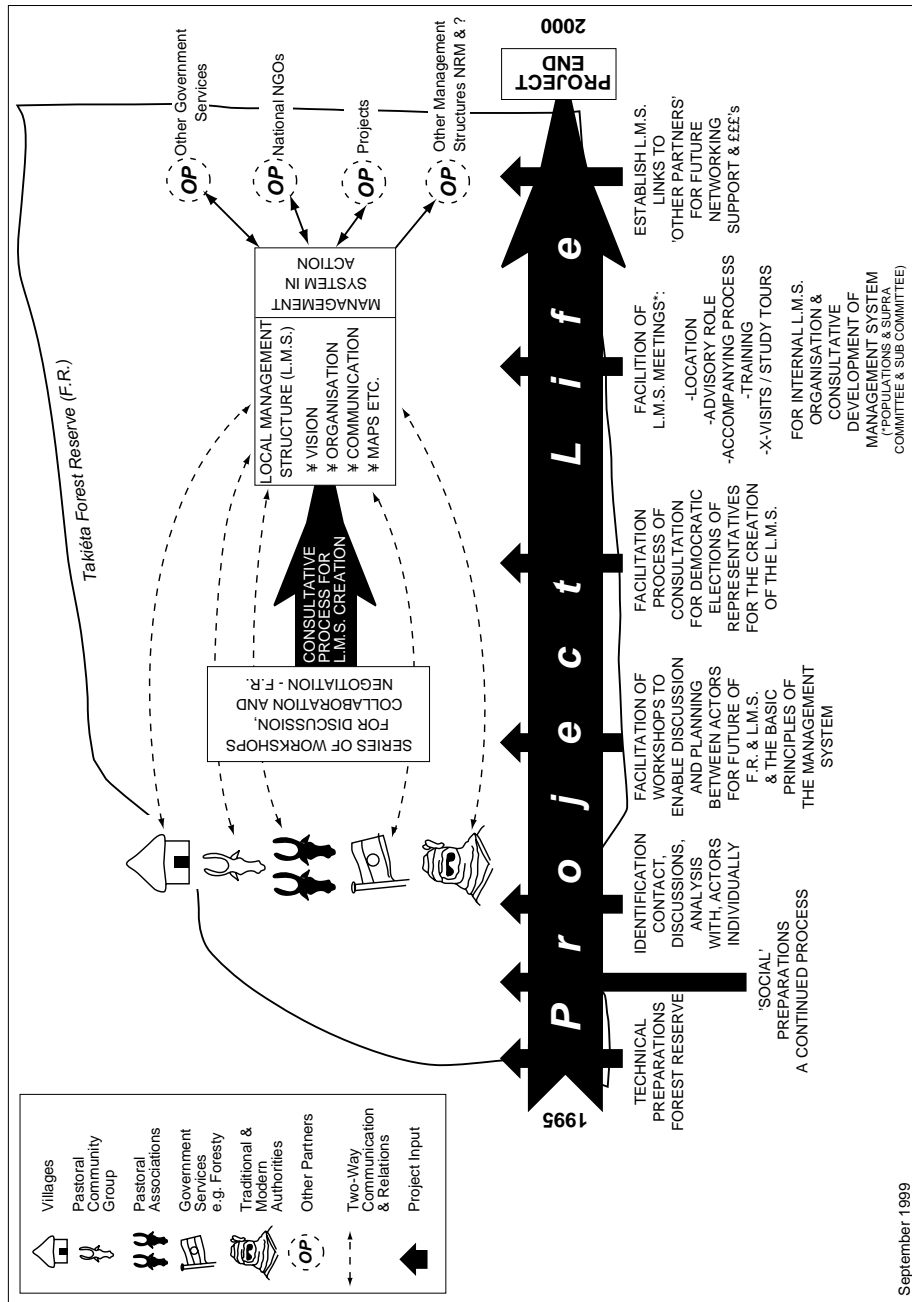
Future challenges for the LMS

The LMS is well aware of the challenges it will face. These include:

- Continuing to ensure the representativeness of the structure.
- Maintaining and further developing communication between all elements of the structure.
- Being formally recognised (legal status/rights to sanction).
- Having the capacity and the flexibility necessary to deal with the continual process of negotiation (between groups and between itself and different groups) as an essential management strategy.
- Preventing and managing conflicts related to communal resource use.
- Achieving adaptive management.
- Convincing all actors of their capacity to manage.

²⁹ The languages spoken by the Fulani and Touareg, respectively.

Figure 7: Diagram representing the role of the TJFMP in the process leading up to the local management of Takiéta Forest Reserve



The role of the project

6

The main role of the project has been one of facilitation (see figure 7). This facilitation has taken many forms from financing fora and providing advice and training, to facilitating contacts with potential future partners (donors and other local resource management bodies) for the LMS. Providing logistical support and facilitating communications between different actors was particularly important at the beginning of the process.

In creating an enabling environment for the emergence of local organisations and management systems the project had three main obligations:

1. To make sure that all the actors were identified³⁰, informed and involved;
2. To bring people together, at least in the initial stages; and
3. To trust in people's basic common sense.

Replicating the Takiéta experience

The objective of the project was to *define the essential elements of a process for the facilitation of context - specific local management* rather than to define a management model for replication elsewhere³¹. We do not propose that others follow the model created for Takiéta step by step, primarily because we believe the structure and system of management at Takiéta are specific to the Takiéta context. However, the process (plus constituent elements) described in this document might be usefully adapted, and the essential elements of this process are summarised in Box 4.

³⁰ The status of Forest Reserve meant that all user groups at Takiéta had something to gain and nothing to lose from becoming involved in the management: identifying users was initiated by the project and continued spontaneously thereafter by the other users. However, common property resources and their status are not always so clear-cut and the role of the project in identifying users and involving them in discussions may well be even more essential and complicated: groups may 'forget', minimise or marginalise others in fear of 'diluting' a perceived level of control over the resource or be reticent about negotiating with others as 'equals' in the management process.

³¹ Several other projects and past development experiences have shown that even 'flexible' models tend to be applied too mechanically and as a result, are very rarely replicable in reality.

Box 4: Essential elements within a process towards decentralised natural resource management

The process

- Clear identification of the resource and its limits.
- Identification of all the different actors, communities and/or users of the resource.
- Analysis by each group of the resource and the role it plays in their system of production.
- Exposure of each actor to the analysis made by the others.
- Build-up and discuss the holistic vision of the dynamics of the resource and prevailing trends.
- Analyse and start to deal with latent, actual and potential conflicts.
- Bring the real representatives of each group of actors together to discuss the future.
- Identify a common vision of what the resource would ideally look like in the future.
- Agree on the principles and first steps in the process of how to achieve this vision.
- Respect the steps identified.
- Focus on the organisational aspects of the management structure.
- Focus on local knowledge and understanding of the resource as the starting point and guiding principal for the management.
- Develop a flexible, representative and evolving structure and system of management with negotiation between users as an implicit part of the process.
- Network and link up with others for moral, technical and/or financial support.

Providing an enabling environment

- All the interested parties involved from the beginning of the negotiation process have the same level of information and analysis.
- Local authorities and Government services are well informed and follow developments from close by.
- People respect each other and an environment of equality is created where everyone has the right to speak, all opinions carry equal weight and decision-making is by consensus.
- Allow people time to think, reason and make their own informed decisions from the very beginning.
- Clarity of vision and purpose and overall transparency.

Replicating a given intervention depends on the pertinence of the intervention itself on a wider scale as well as the cost in terms of time and financial resources required in relation to foreseen returns.

In judging the replicability of the Takiéta experience it is necessary to differentiate clearly between *Process and Project*³².

However, the Takiéta experience does highlight certain cost implications related to process facilitation. In addition to project operation and the initial activities to resolve a number of technical issues (see section 4: “Getting started”), the main costs associated with the process itself have been the following.

i) The facilitation of regular meetings of the management structure LMS itself. The project met the logistical costs (food and lodgings) of LMS members for these meetings. It was very important for all members (locals, services and associations alike) to minimise the level of subsidy from the beginning. LMS meetings are always going to cost money; local people do not have the means to travel and work as volunteers in the long term and at least need to be able to meet their costs. The LMS is now budgeting for such meetings in its planning forecasts with the long-term view of funding operating costs from the forest revenue.

ii) Travelling to inform, communicate and collaborate with all actors - “To make friends one must have feet” (Hausa proverb). Where there is awareness and genuine interest, and when people feel a need to communicate, they will find the most appropriate and affordable methods to do so. Traditional systems will be used and formalised and new links will be developed at local level as well as networks further afield so that those who need to know can find out and those with something to say can be heard.

iii) Holding workshops at which all actors are represented. This type of workshop was probably the single most expensive activity but also one of the most essential and powerful, especially given the experimental nature of the project³³. Transparent and consensual decisions made by everyone in front of everyone at such workshops are extremely binding and make subsequent sabotage, local power-play and manipulation by particular interest-groups very difficult³⁴. Two factors will have augmented these costs in the case of Takiéta:

The ‘Project Effect’

For a project to exist it costs money to pay for infrastructure, salaries and operational costs. In addition, the *‘project effect’* means that activities tend to cost more than

32 The TJFMP had two distinct elements to it: the management of the forest reserve and working with communities on initiatives outside the reserve. While only the forest reserve process has been described here, the overall project budget reflects this duality.

33 Such workshops give the LMS at Takiéta its working mandate, in the same way that continual communication and two-way feedback with the different communities gives legitimacy to the structure.

34 The case of the absence of protest against the relocation of families to Kasa de Ruwa provides an example of this.

would otherwise be the case³⁵. While the 'project effect' needs to be minimised it doesn't necessarily have negative implications on post-project developments as long as there is transparency and all actors are aware of the situation.

The innovation cost

- One has to break eggs to make an omelette. Creating something new means testing and learning from mistakes and changing tack from time to time as the situation evolves. This inevitably costs time and money, but is a necessary part of exploring new possibilities.
- It takes time and therefore (for a project) money for people to change their perceptions and behaviour without the existence of previous examples.
- Test cases should aim to set new standards against which subsequent initiatives will be judged. It is important therefore to follow through ideas as rigorously as possible during the test so as to provide good learning material and new bench-marks³⁶. This follow-up inevitably has cost implications.

The project has been in existence for nearly five years and the actual physical management of the forest is just starting. This has led to some criticism that the process took too long. The process did take time to get going, but once people were brought together, the process they initiated was very rapid and accelerated after the creation of the local management structure. The time and effort spent by the LMS in making contact and repeatedly consulting and negotiating with different users over the final local management document were considered by the members as a necessary investment to secure popular support and legitimacy for the task ahead. The investment was justified in terms of making the work of managing easier and more sustainable.

However, the emphasis on process presents a serious challenge when trying to 'scale-up' the experience of Takiéta. In addition to disseminating the Takiéta experience (through workshops, documents such as this one and other media such as radio and video), SOS Sahel in Niger is currently in the process of developing a follow-up programme to TJFMP at the level of the Département de Zinder. This programme will focus on the transfer of appropriate skills to local populations and government partners, drawing on the confidence that the experience at Takiéta has provided.

35 For example, where project vehicles are available they are more convenient to transport several people; without the project, local transport would be cheaper and fewer people would travel.

36 The TJFMP has on a number of occasions been accused of being 'too participatory' and not 'moving things along' fast enough. However, it is only in rigorously respecting the process that one can convince the same critics of local people's capacity to manage and make informed decisions.

Some lessons learnt and points for debate

The experience of Takiéta has been one of learning, for the local people, government partners, the project itself and SOS Sahel (UK). The aim of this document has been to describe the process we followed and to draw out the key elements from this process that we believe have been fundamental to the success so far. The process is ongoing: hands on management of the forest has only just begun and some of the challenges that lie ahead have been outlined above.

We conclude by drawing out some of the lessons learnt through the course of the project, some of which remain points for debate. These lessons relate to the role of people within decentralised management, the process itself, and the specific challenges presented by natural resource management in general and the Sahelian context in particular.

In relation to people...

- People need to understand why decentralised management is necessary and be convinced that it needs to take place (and will take place) before they are willing to take an active part in it.
- Stakeholders need to understand clearly where their own interests lie as well as the situation, interests and preoccupations of other stakeholders in order to effectively collaborate and negotiate.
- People need to follow a process in order to accept changes and this process takes time, especially where changes in roles and responsibilities are concerned.
- People need to be personally convinced of the need to manage and that they have the capacity, opportunity and ultimately the authority to do so.
- Trust in people's common sense. Learning to analyse, collaborate and make joint decisions is part of the process. Though apparent 'mistakes' might initially be made, once a solution is found it's most often a very sustainable one.
- Two way communication is essential. All stakeholders should be involved and informed of what is taking place and have the opportunity not only to voice but have their opinion taken into account. This avoids the feeling of being marginalised and the tendency to directly or indirectly sabotage the process.

In relation to the process...

- Decentralisation and its consequences (power to local people) are often regarded as a threat by local authorities and government departments. Efforts should be made from the outset of any project to convince all working partners of the necessity and inevitability of changing roles in the future. The changing roles should be seen as a challenge and potential long-term 'win-win' situation.
- A management structure needs to have the legitimacy, popular support and negotiation skills to deal with political personalities who may see the presence of the structure as being against their personal interests.

In relation to a natural resource management context...

- Facilitating bodies such as projects need to be very consistent in their approach and avoid half measures. If one believes that local people are capable of managing resources, they are (by the same argument) capable of undertaking all the necessary steps and making all the necessary decisions in order to achieve this. The key is to ensure that structures are representative and democratically conceived and run.
- Decentralised management will remain a myth if the new managers are, for example, incapable of carrying out a local inventory of their resource or monitoring environmental changes over time themselves. The relevance of classical inventories should be seriously questioned: the data that comes out of these has no meaning to local management structures. Rather, one should be looking for the managers to carry out their own form of inventory which is appropriate, meaningful and useful to them. This does not necessarily mean a loss of quality information and may well produce the contrary.
- Management tools need to be effective (type and quality of information generated) and appropriate (simple, not time consuming and inexpensive, particularly in a Sahelian context) in order for them to be applicable by local managers.

In relation to the Sahelian context...

- In a Sahelian context, adaptive management should be the rule, rather than fixed longer-term management plans.
- Wood is not the only resource in a forest, in a Sahelian context other resources such as the pasture or even space are regarded locally as more important.
- Concepts such as carrying capacity have a limited meaning in a situation where livestock numbers cannot, for socio-political and climatic reasons, be controlled and where natural resources are highly unpredictable.

Appendix 1

About SOS Sahel UK

SOS SAHEL INTERNATIONAL UK

Mission Statement

SOS Sahel works to improve the livelihoods of people living in poverty in the Sahel region of Africa, particularly through enabling them to manage better the natural environment in which they live.

What we do

SOS Sahel's main activity is to fund and implement projects with communities in the poorest parts of the Sahel. This operational work is supplemented by research and by policy dialogue with governments and aid agencies.

SOS Sahel projects are designed to apply the following principles

- innovation - experiment and risk-taking.
- participation - ownership by local people and institutions.
- replicability - potential for wide and sustainable use of successful methods.
- apprenticeship - development through learning of individuals and communities.

In addition to its work in the field, SOS Sahel is concerned to raise understanding in the North of conditions, problems and opportunities in the Sahel.

In addition to a common SOS Sahel UK philosophy, each country office has developed its own mission and strategies.

SOS Sahel UK in Niger

SOS Sahel UK has been working in Niger since 1991 and has the following vision and mission.

Vision: To have local populations actively managing the natural resources on which they depend in a rational, representative and equitable way in order to achieve greater livelihood security and combat poverty. This implies a process of empowerment of local people.

Mission: To promote decentralised resource management as one of the most effective methods of facilitating real, long-term development through a programme focus on four key areas;

- i) Supporting processes leading to decentralised management of natural resources;
- ii) Promotion of the participatory development process;
- iii) Promotion of the representation of marginalised groups in the decision-making process;
- iv) Promotion of collaboration and negotiation as permanent and essential elements in the management of natural resources in the Sahel.

All the SOS Sahel UK projects in Niger are based on the conviction that:

- Local management of natural resources is primarily a social rather than a technical challenge.
- Local populations have the right to be fully involved in the management of the resources on which they depend.
- Local populations are capable of rational management given the real opportunity.

In addition, SOS Sahel UK in Niger recognises the importance of innovation, research, evaluation and the taking of risks as a permanent process. Essential characteristics for all the projects include the following:

- Sustainability of activities;
- Replicability of activities;
- Popular and representative participation;
- Adopt a process approach;
- Auto-evaluation;
- Capacity building at individual, community and institutional level;
- The empowerment of individuals, communities and institutions;
- Promoting communication (collaboration and negotiation) between actors;
- Respond to a felt need by local people;
- Innovation;
- Capitalise on experiences (positive and negative).

