

## The case of Bamako and its peri-urban settlements, Mali

This paper summarizes the findings of a research project conducted by the Malian NGO, GRAD (Groupe Recherche Actions pour le Développement). Address: Rue 461, Porte 120, Niaréla, Bamako, Mali. Telephone (+223) 218873; email: grad.mali@malinet.ml.

### Introduction

Bamako, the capital of Mali, is also its main urban centre. Its population almost doubled between 1987 and 1998, rising from around 660,000 to more than a million inhabitants. This rapid growth has had two important consequences: a) strong demand for food products, especially vegetables; and b) urban sprawl which is increasingly encroaching on peri-urban farmland. This shrinkage of cultivated areas is related to the lack of security of tenure deriving from the absence of a legal framework governing the relationship between statutory and customary tenure systems. As a result, peri-urban areas fall into something of a legal limbo.

The decentralization process which began in Mali in the 1990s entered its operational phase with local elections held in May and June 1999. New *communes* are now responsible for local planning and will therefore play a key role in managing peri-urban areas.

This paper summarizes the main features of the interaction between the city of Bamako and two peri-urban centres. Dialakorodji, to the north of Bamako District, has some 12,000 inhabitants, including a substantial proportion of migrants from the surrounding region and, to a lesser extent, former residents of Bamako looking for low cost accommodation. Although it has recently gained the status of a rural *commune*, its dense population and close ties of economic dependency on Bamako mean that it is more of a dormitory suburb of the capital. Baguinéda is a rural *commune* along the road between Bamako and Ségou. Its agricultural focus is underlined by the presence of several support and extension agencies and an irrigated rice-growing scheme. The village is an important source of horticultural products for the markets in Bamako.

### Economic activities and income sources

Economic relations between the two villages and Bamako are fundamentally different. On the one hand, for the inhabitants of Dialakorodji, declining availability and access to farmland – due to intensive housing development – has resulted in the gradual abandonment of farming and the prevalence of non-farm employment, mostly involving commuting to Bamako (with people working as labourers, civil servants, traders, etc.). On the other hand, the main activities of Baguinéda's inhabitants are still farming and horticulture. Urban

demand has stimulated both agricultural production and the emergence of commercial activities conducted by women.

- In Dialakorodji, average incomes are low. However, perceptions of change over the last ten years vary depending on gender. For men, lack of farmland, fierce competition in the informal sector and unemployment following the closure of several factories in Bamako have led to an ongoing decline in incomes and living standards. For women, who traditionally have limited access to farmland, the proximity of Bamako's markets has increased their opportunities to engage in petty trading of agricultural produce from neighbouring villages, bringing about some improvement in their incomes;
- In Baguinéda, farming is the main source of employment and income for the bulk of the population. Rice, cereals and vegetables are the most important crops. Almost 80% of men are farmers and very few of them are involved in trading. On the other hand, women are particularly likely to engage in trading (44%) and horticulture (34.5%). Both these activities benefit from the proximity of Bamako's markets. However, income from farming and horticulture has fallen over the last ten years. This is mainly due to the lack of local infrastructure for processing and preserving produce, which particularly affects perishables (fruit and vegetables); the high cost of inputs and inadequate credit; and the lack of organized marketing of produce. This means that the perishability of produce and inadequate financial liquidity have negative consequences for both producers and women traders;
- At both sites, it is mainly the average and higher income groups who diversify their income sources. In Dialakorodji, where 65% of the people interviewed do not have a secondary activity, the lack of capital and of know-how are the main reasons why groups who no longer have farmland cannot engage in non-farm activities. On the other hand, in Baguinéda, it is the lack of non-farm employment opportunities which limits farmers' ability to diversify, whereas many public servants, especially guards and teachers, are now turning to farming. This trend is becoming more marked as the government encourages early retirement in line with its structural adjustment policies.

### **Tenure systems and access to land**

Two tenure systems coexist in Mali: the statutory system, governed by legislation, is mainly used in urban areas by private individuals. Based on purchase, it presupposes a genuine financial transaction. Conversely, the traditional system is prevalent in rural areas and is based on land allocation by indigenous customary owners. It includes actual gifts, inheritance and symbolic purchase through the gift of cola nuts. As such, it rests essentially on the existence of traditional authorities. This situation influences access to land in peri-urban areas:

- In Dialakorodji, access to land is completely beyond the control of the customary authorities, who have long since sold everything to outsiders, whether resident or not. In addition, with the substantial inflow of migrants

from the region and from the city, a new governing class of the mayor with his councillors is trying to replace the traditional chieftaincies;

- As a result, the most important mode of access to land is purchase, which favours better-off groups. These are also the only ones who can afford to purchase the few arable plots that are still available, reducing the opportunity for low-income groups to take up farming to increase their income or for their own consumption;
- In Baguinéda, allocation remains the dominant mode of acquiring land, although it is losing ground in the face of heavy demand from city-dwellers. However, land is not the subject of financial transactions as it is in Dialakorodji. There is less speculation over land which is still controlled by indigenous and long-standing residents;
- This has important repercussions on agricultural production and horticulture: producers can hire migrants as labourers, offering the loan of a plot to cultivate for themselves during part of the week in place of a wage in cash. This form of traditional contract is of particular benefit to under-capitalised small farmers.

## Mobility

Population movements fall into the following broad categories: out-migration from villages, often to urban destinations and sometimes abroad; inward movement from other centres; and movements which do not involve changing residence (commuting). Here again, there are substantial differences between the two peri-urban sites:

- Dialakorodji is an important destination for migrants from rural areas of the region, but also for city-dwellers looking for somewhere to live in the wake of housing development schemes in Bamako. The latter are mainly low-income groups who cannot afford the growing cost of city accommodation;
- Movement from Dialakorodji is also substantial. This is mainly short term: most economic activities take place in Bamako, so a large proportion of the population commutes daily. Limited access to health and education services in Dialakorodji is another major reason for travelling to the city;
- Baguinéda is the destination for a small number of civil servants employed in parastatal agencies supporting agricultural production; a larger group of incomers is made up of migrants from the region, employed as seasonal labourers by the village inhabitants. There are fewer movements towards Bamako, bearing witness to the economic dynamism of Baguinéda. Health services are also available locally. Nevertheless, almost 50% of households have or have had children at school in the city. Investment in education is an important feature of the village and one of the positive aspects of the proximity of Bamako.

## Decentralization and administrative and political processes

In administrative terms, the two villages are rural *communes*. Whereas economic activity and housing in Baguinéda are clearly rural in nature, although undergoing rapid change, Dialakorodji has more “urban” features, such as dense population and almost total absence of farming activity. This

means that the challenges for the new authorities arising from decentralization are quite different:

- The lack of infrastructure in Dialakorodji is a particular problem, bearing in mind population density. The availability of water, for drinking and other purposes, is very limited and subject to seasonal fluctuation. There is virtually no household waste management and the village is used as a dump for industrial and household waste from the city;
- The division into *communes* does not reflect the reality of social and economic symbiosis between Dialakorodji and Bamako. The rural *commune* is potentially in a weak position in relation to the urban *commune* of Bamako, with which it must nevertheless negotiate the management of resources such as water and the use of its land for the dumping of urban waste. The priority issue is the need to improve the environment and infrastructure of Dialakorodji, which will depend to a large extent on its capacity to negotiate with Bamako ;
- In Baguinéda, the challenge for the new *commune* is more a matter of ensuring that the local population can maintain control over its land and that ever-increasing demand from the city does not lead to the total monetarization of tenure relations. That would undoubtedly have a negative impact on agricultural production, especially as regards small farmers who lack capital.

## Key issues

The proximity of the city exerts substantial influence over peri-urban areas. Although this influence may be positive, for instance by giving more access to non-farm employment or inasmuch as demand from urban consumers boosts horticultural activities, not all groups can take advantage of these opportunities in the same way. Access to land for those lacking resources is an important issue that must be addressed in planning.

Diversification of income sources to include farming and non-farm activities is one of the potential benefits available in peri-urban areas. However, it seems that only well-off groups are able to exploit these opportunities, because of the high cost of land or the lack of local non-farm employment. If all groups are to benefit, job opportunities need to be expanded at local level. Access to credit, training and land is another important aspect of this.

The *communes*, new structures resulting from the decentralization process, are called upon to play a major role in planning, including land-use planning. They need to guarantee local control over land, as well as to negotiate with the city to ensure that common resources such as water are managed fairly and regulate the use of their territory for dumping urban waste.