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Gender and natural resource conflict management in Nioro du Sahel, Mali

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and Aly Dama

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Contents

1. Introduction 1

2. Natural resource conflict management in Nioro 3

3. The programme "Enhancing local capacity to manage conflicts" 6
3.1 Overview of the programme 6
3.2 Approach and methodology 6

4. The process supported by the programme 9
4.1 Stage 1: Gender analysis of NR conflict management institutions and mechanisms 9
4.2 Stage 2: Facilitation of a locally-identified strategy 11
4.3 Stage 3: Awareness raising 21
4.4 Stage 4: Monitoring and evaluation 22

5. Achievements and challenges 25
5.1 Integrating gender in NR conflict management 25
5.2 Other achievements 26
5.3 Open questions 27

6. Conclusion 29

References 31

1. Introduction

> *"Conflicts are more likely to be handled creatively and to end constructively where levels of participation are high, and where channels exist for the expression of disagreement and mechanisms are available for handling disagreement and reaching consensus. All sections of the community have a voice, both men and women, young and old…"* (Fisher, Abdi, Ludin, Smith, Williams and Williams 2000:147)

As important natural resource users, women are affected by and involved in natural resource (NR) conflicts, and contribute to their resolution or exacerbation. Women's direct involvement in NR conflicts may result in their suffering violence, loss of income, loss of access to resources and restrictions on freedom of movement. Women can also be indirectly affected as wives or daughters of men involved or injured in disputes. On the other hand, throughout Africa, women make positive contributions to NR conflict management. Due to gender-differentiated roles and responsibilities, women have different perspectives and needs to men, and can thus provide different analysis and solutions for conflict management. While their participation in NR conflict management institutions remains remarkably low, women often play an important role behind closed doors, for instance by influencing their male kin.

For too long, researchers and practitioners of NR conflict management have largely neglected the gender dimension of conflict. This situation has recently started to change, and it is now increasingly recognised that gender analysis is fundamental to understanding NR conflicts and to constructively addressing them. Analysing conflict from a gender perspective entails looking beyond the "public face" of inter-community conflict to understand its dynamics within communities and households, and to understand the differing roles, responsibilities, needs and sources of power of men and women (Fisher *et al.* 2000).

This paper addresses these issues by describing the experience of a participatory process to facilitate the integration of gender in NR conflict management institutions in northern Mali. This process took place within the context of an action-research and capacity-building programme imple-

mented by IIED and Jam Sahel, a Malian NGO, in the *cercle* of Nioro, Mali. While this experience may have lessons for similar programmes and activities in West Africa and elsewhere, it is important to note that its primary learning significance is, and was meant to be, for the men and women directly involved in the process. Therefore, although some of the results and lessons of the process may reflect findings that are already consolidated or debated in international literature, they have helped increase local understanding of gender dynamics in Nioro.

Box 1. Definitions: gender and conflict management

In this study, the term "gender" refers to the socially constructed roles of men and women as well as to the interactions between them. In this sense, it differs from the term "sex", which refers to the biological differences between men and women. Moreover, "gender" is defined here to include consideration for the differentiation between men and between women (in terms of income, social status, caste, literacy, etc.).

"Conflict management" is broadly defined to encompass a wide range of mechanisms and institutions for both the prevention and the peaceful resolution of disputes, including negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration.

2. Natural resource conflict management in Nioro

The *cercle* of Nioro is located in the Sahelian belt of Mali, close to the border with Mauritania. Its population includes different ethnic groups (mainly Bambara, Sarakolé and Fulani) and different social groups (mainly farmers and herders). In recent years, disputes have erupted between farmers and herders and between different herding groups. These disputes mainly relate to access to natural resources, and are attributable to some key factors.

Firstly, cultivation has encroached upon pastoral lands, including pastures and transhumance routes. As a result, herders find their routes barred by fields as they drive their animals to and from wet and dry season pastures, while crops are damaged by the passage of herds. The inability of current land legislation to regulate pastoral and agricultural land use is at the heart of this problem, although the recently passed *Charte Pastorale* should, if properly implemented, specifically address this issue.

Secondly, the lack of dry season water (providing access to dry season pastures) is a problem in certain areas of the *cercle*, resulting in herders and farmers having to compete for scarce water resources. As agricultural land use is usually granted priority over pastoral uses, this results in the exclusion of herders from strategic water points at critical moments of the year.

Thirdly, banditry and livestock rustling are endemic in the region, triggering revenge attacks on suspected neighbours or transhumant herders. Who these "bandits" are is not acknowledged in public, and it is difficult to know to what extent they are professional brigands or just disaffected youth. Clearly the easy availability of modern weapons is a major factor contributing to this phenomenon and efforts to reduce the trafficking of guns and other weaponry would help stabilise the situation.

Underlying the above problems is a breakdown in trust and communication between resident and non-resident pastoral groups and their agro-pastoral neighbours. Although the root causes for this are not completely clear, evidence suggests that customary systems of reciprocity which used to exist between farming and non-farming groups are no longer as wide-

spread or efficient as they used to be. Many herding groups have lost their livestock and are no longer able to exchange milk and manure with sedentary farmers. The latter are increasingly investing in cattle and managing their livestock themselves, rather than confiding them to Fulani herdsmen as they did in the past. Moreover, these sedentary agro-pastoralists no longer need transhumant herders to obtain manure for their fields, and tend to keep local pastoral resources (e.g. crop residues) for themselves.

In 1997, disputes caused by these factors resulted in violent clashes that left over one hundred people dead. In 1998, "intercommunity peace agreements" were drawn up with the support of local MPs, customary leaders and the administration. To monitor compliance with the agreements, a "peace committee" ("*comité de suivi des accords de paix inter - communautaires*") was set up for each of the seven *arrondissements* of the *cercle*. The committees are composed of "the great and the good" from the local communities, including customary authorities, mayors and other prominent figures, so as to represent the different ethnic groups living in the area. From a legal point of view, the committees have no formal status, and operate informally in close cooperation with formal institutions (e.g. the *communes*). Their activities include conflict prevention, through awareness-raising and information-disseminating village tours, and conflict resolution (mainly through conciliation). The peace committees have been very effective in restoring peace in the *cercle*. However, some major issues need to be addressed in the longer term, including:

- the clarification of their relationship with the *communes*, recently set up under the decentralisation policy and entrusted with natural resource management responsibilities;
- their long-term economic sustainability (at the moment, the committees are funded by external donors); and
- the clarification of the roles of the different dispute settlement institutions, such as the peace committees, the judiciary and the conflict management committees established by the *communes*, in order to avoid situations of uncoordinated legal pluralism and "institutional shopping".

As for gender, most women are excluded from public decision-making, including NR conflict management, mainly due to gender division of

roles, domestic and childcare responsibilities, culture/tradition, restrictions and difficulties in travelling and exclusion from access to and control of natural resources. Socio-cultural attitudes are often internalised by women themselves, and many women have expressed fears about what others in the community (both men and women) may think if they were to be involved in NR conflict management. As a result of all these factors, when the peace committees were created, no woman was nominated as member. Nonetheless, as elsewhere in Africa, women do play a variety of important roles in conflict management. Women's influence over family members through their advice and support is largely recognised as an informal means of guiding the protagonists of conflict. More publicly, some elderly women are recognised as having respected skills and status and are looked to for assistance and advice in conflict situations. Also, more recently, some women's groups are proving their capacity through the successful management of their own conflicts.

3. The programme "Enhancing local capacity to manage conflicts"

3.1 Overview of the programme

The programme "Enhancing Local Capacity to Manage Conflicts" and its follow-up activities are funded by NORAD and run in partnership by IIED and by Jam Sahel, a Malian NGO. The programme addresses conflicts over natural resources in the *cercle* of Nioro, by acting at three levels: improving understanding among all stakeholders of the causes and consequences of conflict over access to natural resources; identifying and supporting appropriate local institutional arrangements to manage NR conflicts; and improving the capacity of local partners to inform government and donor policy on NR conflict management. The programme includes a gender component, aimed at supporting a process of reflection on gender and NR conflict management, involving the peace committees, the *communes*, women's groups and other government and civil society actors.

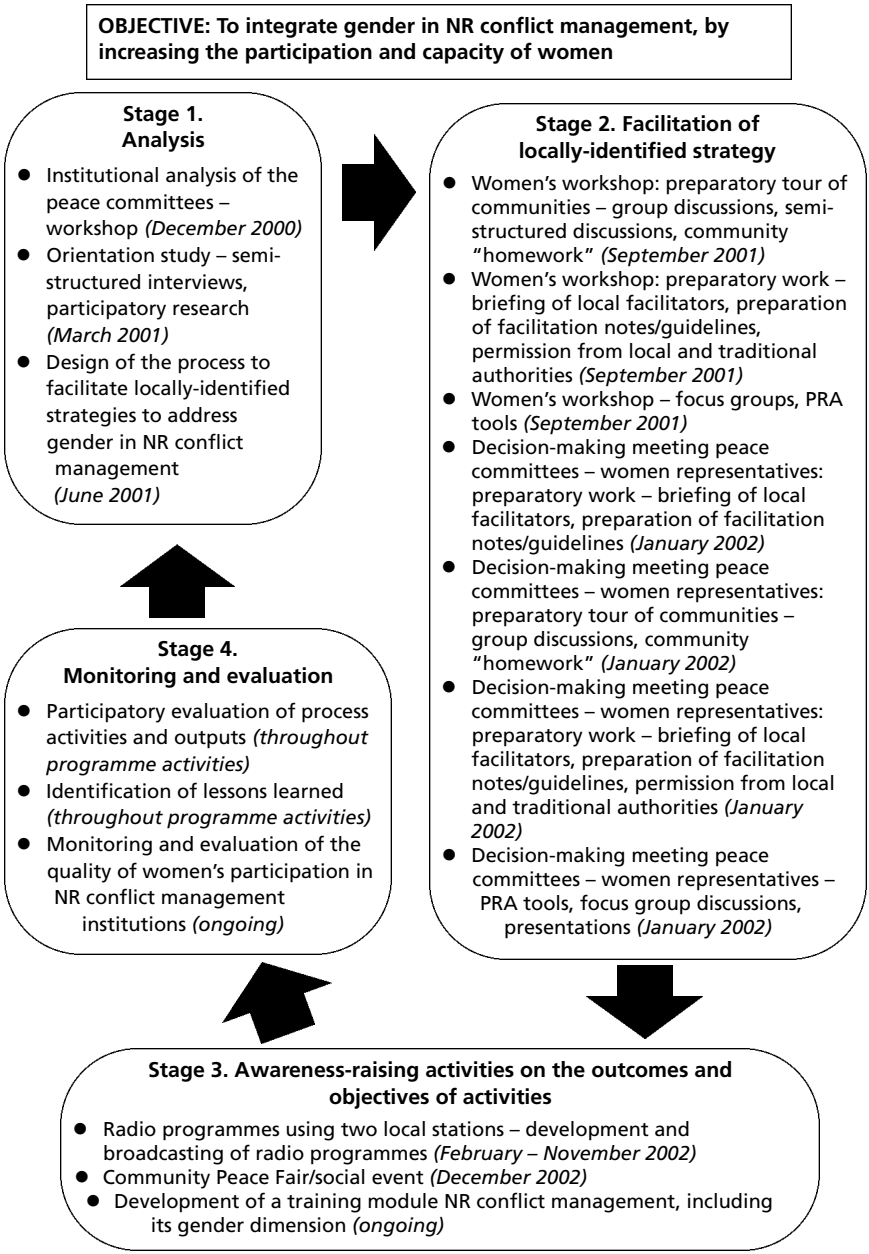
The programme was originally designed for a two-year period, from 1999 to 2001. A second phase (2002) is being terminated, while consultations for a follow-up programme are under way.

3.2 Approach and methodology

The programme uses a participatory, gender-sensitive, process-orientated approach aimed at strengthening the capacity of local partners (Jam Sahel, peace committees, etc.) to analyse problems relating to NR conflict management and to identify appropriate strategies for their solution.

The gender-sensitive participatory approach goes beyond a "mythical" notion of community as a homogeneous and cohesive unit for participation, to consideration of gender relations within communities and households. In so doing, it uses methods that are respectful of local culture and tradition. Indeed, rather than directly affirming and promoting women's rights in a "confrontational" way, the programme aims to facilitate understanding of the potential contribution of men's and women's complementary perspectives and abilities in NR conflict management, so that local communities themselves can determine how to integrate gender in conflict management institutions.

Figure 1. A four-stage approach



As for the process perspective, rather than focusing on predetermined outputs, the programme aims to establish and facilitate a process whereby local stakeholders can identify strategies and activities to solve their own problems. In this approach, programme outcomes are not predetermined, and programme activities are kept flexible to accommodate demands from local stakeholders and lessons learned during implementation. The process is articulated in four stages:

- gender analysis of NR conflict management;
- identification of strategies to address the issues raised by the analysis;
- promotion of awareness and acceptance of these strategies; and
- monitoring and evaluation of processes and outcomes.

Rather than a fourth phase, monitoring and evaluation activities are carried out, to varying degrees, throughout the various phases of the process, resulting, where needed, in the reorientation of programme activities. Figure 1 summarises the process, tools and methodology used.

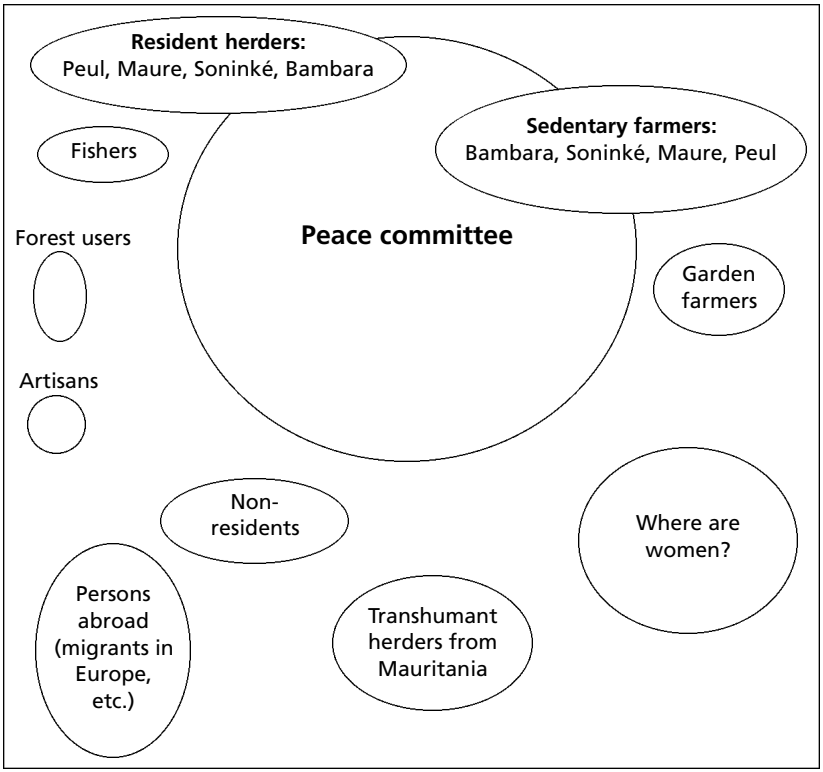
The process perspective is reflected in the structure of this paper, which presents the experience of the programme focusing on the four stages of the process (and on the possible methodological lessons that these may have) rather than on programme outcomes.

4. The process supported by the programme

4.1 Stage 1: Gender analysis of NR conflict management institutions and mechanisms

The first stage of the process was an institutional analysis of existing mechanisms for NR conflict management, namely the peace committees. The analysis was carried out in a participatory way at a workshop attended by Jam Sahel and by representatives of the peace committees. The analysis revealed that some groups, including women, were not represented in the committees. One of the diagrams elaborated at the workshop is reproduced below (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The degree of representativeness of the peace committees



Source: Dama 2000, with adaptations.

On the basis of this institutional analysis, workshop participants discussed how to involve the groups that were not represented in the peace committees. As for women in particular, most participants recognised the potential contribution that women may offer to NR conflict management and acknowledged that women should play a bigger role in conflict management institutions. However, it remained unclear how this should be done and what obstacles needed to be addressed. Jam Sahel was thus assigned the responsibility of carrying out an orientation study on the role of women in NR conflict management.

The orientation study was carried out in six *communes* by a team of researchers including staff of Jam Sahel, an external researcher and members of the local community involved with the peace committees. Semi-structured interviews were carried out in meetings with the peace committees and with women. While the latter were open to all women, they tended to be attended largely by members of women's associations (credit, market gardening, etc). Disparities within and between women's groups may have biased certain aspects of the results, for example due to differences in social composition, in literacy, in experience with NGOs, and so on.

The orientation study documented women's lack of representation in conflict management institutions and the major obstacles underlying it. In particular, the study found that the majority of women did not inherit land nor gain direct access to it by other means, and that women were not represented in NR management institutions, including those preventing and resolving disputes.

The findings of the orientation study were discussed with local men and women. The discussion revealed local support for integrating gender in NR conflict management, although there was no agreement on how to do so and traditionalists still exerted considerable influence. The discussion also produced recommendations for a process of reflection on the gender dimension of NR conflict management. The activities envisaged for this process included a workshop for discussion and awareness-raising among women, a decision-making meeting between women representatives and the peace committees, and awareness-raising and dissemination activities through local radio. Therefore, while at this stage there was no consensus on how to address gender issues in NR conflict management, the analysis did result in the establishment of a locally

owned process through which these strategies could be identified and implemented.

Throughout this first stage, the active participation of the peace committees was crucial in two main respects. Firstly, since the committees constitute major NR conflict management institutions in the *cercle*, their involvement from the early stages of the programme was necessary in order to effectively address gender issues in relation to conflict management. Secondly, since membership of the committees includes many key figures and leaders in the local community, their involvement (e.g. their request for the orientation study) provided backing and legitimacy for Jam Sahel's gender-related activities, and constituted an important signal for others in the community to challenge existing gender divisions of roles.

4.2 Stage 2: Facilitation of a locally-identified strategy

4.2.1 Preparatory activities

Programme activities

The first step of the process outlined during the analysis stage was a workshop bringing together representatives of women from all the *communes* of the *cercle* of Nioro. Before holding the workshop, however, preparatory activities were carried out to support local understanding, ownership and participation in the process. These preparatory activities were centred on a tour of all the *communes*, carried out by a team composed of a representative of the local women's association (*Coordination des femmes de Nioro*), a member of the peace committee and an external advisor from Jam Sahel. The tour consisted of community meetings, which were widely attended and were supported by the presence of the local mayor, peace committee members and village chiefs. The meetings aimed to raise community awareness and understanding of the activities planned, to stimulate preparatory discussions on the gender dimension of NR conflict management, and to ask women in each of the 16 *communes* to elect two delegates for the workshop. Some basic criteria for the selection of the delegates were suggested, which emphasised personal skills and knowledge of NR management issues, rather than political or ethnic affiliation.

Preparatory tour: meeting with women in Gavinané

Preparatory tour: meeting with women

Lessons learned
The preparatory tour proved invaluable for subsequent activities, particularly the workshop. Given women's exclusion from NR conflict management decision-making, preparatory discussions were necessary in order to enhance their capacity and self-confidence to talk at a workshop about topics that had until then been regarded as within men's exclusive domain. The preparatory tour was also instrumental in facilitating the permission and acceptance of women's attendance of the workshop (in the local culture, women's participation in activities outside the home is subject to authorisation by the husband).

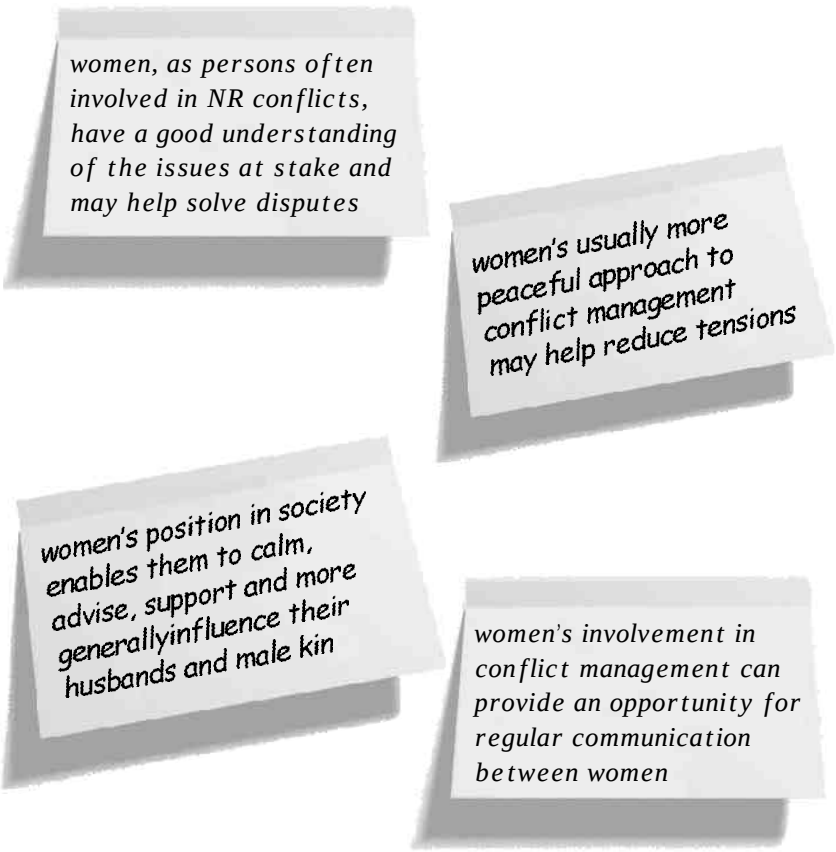
Some lessons were learned also in relation to the way the preparatory activities were carried out. The use of local and respected facilitators, including the president of the local women's associations, proved useful to establish contacts with women in rural areas and to foster trust in programme activities. Moreover, the use of female (rather than male) facilitators helped encourage women to participate and talk more freely. Finally, the involvement of local government authorities gave official backing to the activities, which further encouraged participation.

4.2.2 Women's workshop

Programme activities
The workshop was attended by 40 women (two women representatives for each of the 16 *communes* of the Nioro *cercle* and eight from Nioro town), with a 100% turnout of invitees. The workshop helped raise awareness among women on NR conflict management; it enabled women to analyse the gender dimension of the issue; and it allowed women to elaborate a strategy to address gender in conflict management.

The workshop involved group discussions facilitated through PRA tools such as the problem wall, the solution tree, the use of proverbs, strengths and weaknesses analysis, as well as a short training in NR conflict. After a first phase in a plenary session, participants were divided into four groups of ten persons each.

An interesting aspect of the workshop was the discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of a greater involvement of women in NR conflict management. The advantages most referred to by participants included the following:



Women then outlined a number of challenges that arise from their involvement in NR conflict management. These can be summarised as:

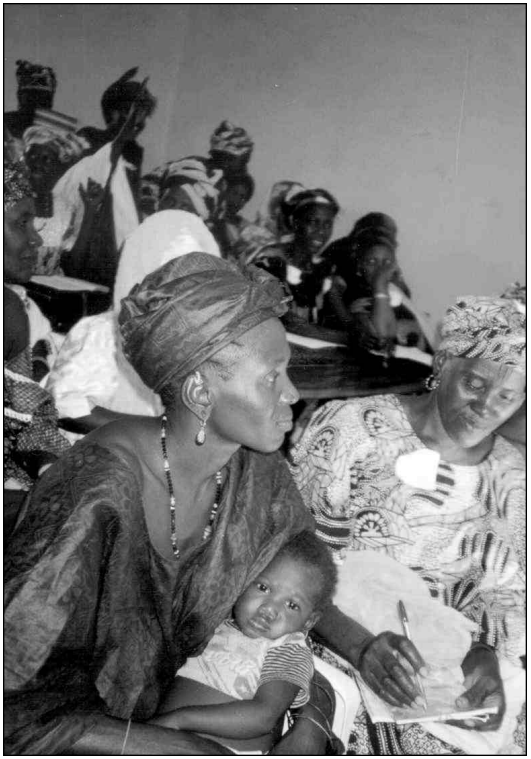
- pressures of domestic and childcare responsibilities;
- resistance from men due to tradition and jealousy;
- illiteracy; and
- women's fear and lack of confidence.

Workshop participants also outlined some possible solutions to these challenges, including creating income-generating opportunities, raising awareness, providing training for women, and mothers' being able to have their children looked after by other female family members.

Lessons learned

Several lessons may be drawn from this workshop. Some lessons relate to the desirability of organising this type of events to promote reflection and discussion ("*whether*"), while others relate to the way these events may be organised ("*how*").

As for the former ("*whether*"), the workshop proved extremely useful, as it enabled women to meet and discuss issues previously considered within men's exclusive domain. This helped increase their self-confidence and showed other community members the important contribution that women can make to NR conflict management, thereby helping reverse entrenched gender perceptions. The 100% turnout of invitees reveals the importance that women attach to the issue of NR conflict management and their enthusiasm for the process. Moreover, the discussions on the advantages, difficulties and nature of women's participation in NR



Women attending the workshop

conflict management helped the programme better understand the local context. On the other hand, many expressed the concern that no action would follow the workshop and that it raised expectations that could not be met. This scepticism was mainly due to the fact that in the past other "outsiders" had organised similar meetings but little action had usually followed.

As for the second type of lessons ("*how*"), the fact that the activities were opened and closed by government officials, by the mayor of Nioro and by the president of the local women's association helped raise the perceived status of the activities and publicly expressed official support for the process. Moreover, the methodology used, encouraging an informal and open debate and making use of traditional practices like the "*cousinage*" (a joking relationship based on ethnicity and surname), helped make participants feel at ease and facilitated contributions to the discussion. Similarly, working in small groups allowed more shy women to contribute. The involvement of local people such as facilitators, babysitters, those preparing food and tea and the local media created a sense of ownership of the workshop. Finally, a team photo and the issuing of certificates of participation were appreciated and helped to formalise the occasion.

4.2.3 Preparing the decision-making meeting

Following the workshop, a two-day "decision-making meeting" was organised, bringing together women's representatives and members of the peace committees. Before this meeting, a series of preparatory activities were again carried out to further inform communities about the process, the results of the workshop, the objectives of the decision-making meeting, and subsequent planned activities. In this context, workshop and research reports were distributed at *commune* level to workshop participants and to the mayor, who had the responsibility of transmitting the information to the rest of the community. The effectiveness of this mechanism to disseminate information was limited, as the workshop reports were lengthy and written in a language (French) not accessible to all. Therefore, the programme had to rely on a few people to summarise and translate them, which raises issues concerning the quality of the translation and who is controlling the information disseminated. Other means of dissemination (e.g. radio programmes) would have probably proved more effective.

Besides disseminating information, the programme promoted discussions in each *commune* between workshop participants and women and other community members, such as the mayor, peace committee members and village chiefs, in order to identify a *commune*-specific strategy for addressing gender in natural resource conflict management. The strategy identified was to be submitted to the decision-making meeting. A format for the proposed strategies was suggested by the programme, and was articulated in a "Who, Why, How, When and What" framework. The nature of the strategies prepared varied according to factors like the nature and extent of support received and the degree of literacy.

During these activities, local facilitators, with the addition of male facilitators from the peace committees, were used in the same way and with the same positive effects as in the women's workshop. The use of local people to support the meeting and the presence of local officials for the opening and closing of ceremonies was also used with the same effect.

4.2.4 The decision-making meeting

Programme activities

The decision-making meeting was attended by some 130 persons, including the women that had participated in the workshop, the (male) members of the peace committees, and government officials.

The first part of the meeting was a plenary session. Participants nominated the facilitators and discussed the purpose of the meeting. This revealed the existence of common aspirations for men and women. Women referred to the purpose of increasing women's involvement in NR conflict management, of obtaining permission and backing from men (especially husbands) for this, and of giving women an opportunity to have their ideas heard. Men identified similar aims, and added the desire to exchange opinions on how to consolidate the inter-community peace process. After this preliminary discussion, men and women worked in separate groups.

Within the women's groups, the two representatives of each *commune* presented the draft strategy elaborated in their *commune* prior to the meeting. This permitted them to discuss the draft strategies and to build confidence before presenting them to the men's group. Moreover, the discussion provided interesting information about the obstacles affecting

women's involvement in NR conflict management, including inadequate support from men and from the peace committees, women's domestic responsibilities and workload, as well as insufficient awareness about gender and family planning.

The men were divided into seven peace committees to discuss advantages, disadvantages and challenges about addressing gender in NR conflict management. While some of the concerns that emerged were directly linked to the local gender division of roles (e.g. that women's increased involvement in NR conflict management may be constrained by their domestic responsibilities and may have a negative impact on house chores), others revealed a substantial lack of gender awareness (for instance, it was feared that women could be influenced by bandits!). When asked whether they were in favour or against redressing gender imbalances in NR conflict management, the men unanimously expressed their support for the initiative, although it remains to be seen whether, beyond these formal statements, silent and passive resistance remains.

During the second day of the meeting, men and women worked together, divided into seven groups based on the territory of the peace committees. For each peace committee, women presented the relevant draft gender strategy. These were subsequently discussed and developed by the groups and presented in the plenary session, where their strengths and weaknesses were discussed. Finally, on the basis of this discussion, each group adopted the gender strategy for the relevant peace committee. Most strategies provide, among other things, for the inclusion of two women representatives in each peace committee, thus enabling women's participation in Nioro's NR conflict management institutions for the first time. Below are two examples of strategies from the peace committees of Sandaré and of Nioro Central.

Moreover, most peace committees resolved to include women in their delegation in a cross-border meeting that was to be organised to bring together local authorities and civil society groups from Nioro and from neighbouring Mauritania. This meeting was to address cross-border issues like international transhumance, but has not been held yet due to the administrative difficulties linked to organising this type of cross-border grassroots event in the region.

Box 2. Gender strategy for the peace committee of Sandaré

Who will be involved in your strategy?	WHY is this strategy necessary?	WHEN do you want to implement this strategy?	HOW will you implement your strategy?	WHAT is necessary to implement your strategies?
• Husbands • Religious and customary chiefs • Elected and administrative authorities • Hunters • Youth • Technical services	• To encourage harmony and social cohesion	• June – October 2002	• Provision of information (using audio-visual methods) • Regular consultations • Raise awareness of husbands • Motivation of courageous women • Female representatives in the peace committees • Frank collaboration between men and women • Develop trust/ confidence between men and women	• Financial and material resources • Training for women • Reduction of domestic work • Identification for each member of the peace committees (badge or papers)

Source: Jam Sahel 2002.

Box 3. Gender strategy for the peace committee of Nioro Central				
WHO will be involved in your strategy?	**WHY is this strategy necessary?**	**WHEN do you want to implement this strategy?**	**HOW will you implement your strategy?**	**WHAT is necessary to implement your strategies?**
• Leaders of women's associations • Community leaders (notables, religious chiefs, association leaders, etc.) • Elected representatives and government authorities • Peace committees • Partners	• To facilitate women's participation • To determine the role of women in NR conflict management • Take into account the diversity of opinions • To avoid frustration and exclusion	• April – December 2002	• Elaborate a calendar of activities • Periodic meetings of the peace committees • Tour of the peace committees • Awareness-raising • Training of leaders	• Financial, material and human resources • Household heads' agreement for women's attendance to meetings • Respect of the calendar of activities • Availability of authorities

Source: Jam Sahel 2002.

Lessons learned

While effective integration of gender in NR conflict management will largely depend on the implementation of the strategies, the decision-making meeting constitutes a landmark step in that direction. First, *com - mune*-specific gender strategies were elaborated and adopted, allowing activities to be carried out and identifying relevant stakeholders. Secondly, and more importantly, these strategies were not imposed from the outside but were elaborated by stakeholders themselves, with support and facilitation from Jam Sahel. The strategies could have been directly drafted by the programme and submitted for endorsement to local stakeholders (women, peace committees, local government bodies, etc.). Going through the participatory process of reflection and analysis (gender analysis, women's workshop, decision-making meeting) was more costly and time-consuming. However, the process enabled stake-

holders to design their own gender strategies and resulted in the adoption of locally-owned and culturally appropriate strategies. This shows that, through discussion and with measured facilitation from outsiders, local populations can analyse their problems and propose meaningful solutions to them. Moreover, besides the importance of participation *per se*, local ownership and cultural appropriateness will prove essential for the implementation of the strategies and for the long-term sustainability of the results they will yield.

The organisation of the meeting provides also methodological lessons on how this type of events may be organised. Lessons include, for instance, the strategic use of mixed and single-sex groups, the need for support and preparation for women before they present and discuss proposals with men (as most women are not used to speaking in public and/or to a male audience) and the importance of respect for local culture, including in relation to gender roles (e.g. men and women eating separately). Moreover, the exercise revealed that even apparently simple terminology may create confusion if it does not reflect or respond to local culture. For instance, problems were experienced with the word "strategy", and the framework proposed ("Who, Why, When, How and What"), while helpful for some, proved confusing for others.

Another issue concerns the use of (local and/or external) facilitators. This proved essential in supporting the whole process in general and the meeting in particular. The presence of the external facilitator particularly encouraged discussions about local tradition and culture. Indeed, as a cultural outsider, the external facilitator could probe into the justifications underpinning certain beliefs and attitudes more easily than local facilitators, as the participants expected the latter to know local culture and not to question accepted practices. On the other hand, questions remain as to the extent to which facilitators may have unconsciously influenced processes and outcomes (e.g. by choosing the exercises carried out, by introducing topics for discussion, and by raising expectations especially in terms of funding).

4.3 Stage 3: Awareness raising

After having adopted strategies to integrate gender in NR conflict management (including through the participation of two women in the peace committees), the process entered its subsequent phase, i.e. the dis-

semination of information and the raising of awareness on the process and on its outputs at household, village and *commune* level. This was done through several channels. Firstly, radio awareness-raising programmes in local languages were broadcasted by two local radio stations (see Box 4).

Box 4. Using rural radio to raise awareness

Given the high illiteracy rates in the region, rural radio offers an invaluable tool to disseminate information on gender and NR conflict management issues. Therefore, to raise awareness on the process and on its outcomes, Jam Sahel elaborated and organised the broadcasting of a series of 12 radio programmes. The programmes were written in a clear and accessible language, were translated in the four main languages of Nioro (namely French, Bamana, Peul and Soninké), and were broadcast by two local radio stations (Radio Jam Sahel and Radio Jamana) using professional radio presenters.

The topics covered by the radio programmes varied widely, ranging from the account of the different stages of the process (women's workshop, decision-making meeting and related activities) to the content of the gender strategies adopted, from the explanation of the reasons for addressing the gender dimension of NR conflict management to the identification of the main obstacles to doing so.

Efforts to devise mechanisms and indicators to assess the impact of these radio programmes are currently underway.

Secondly, lessons learned on the gender dimension of NR conflict management are being integrated in a training module on alternative dispute resolution that Jam Sahel is developing through its training institution (*Institut Rural d'Education Civique*, IREC), in partnership with IIED and with other institutions from West Africa.

4.4 Stage 4: Monitoring and evaluation

Consistently with the iterative process approach adopted by the programme (see above, Figure 1), monitoring and evaluation has been carried out throughout the process, so as to reorient, when needed, programme activities. However, during programme implementation,

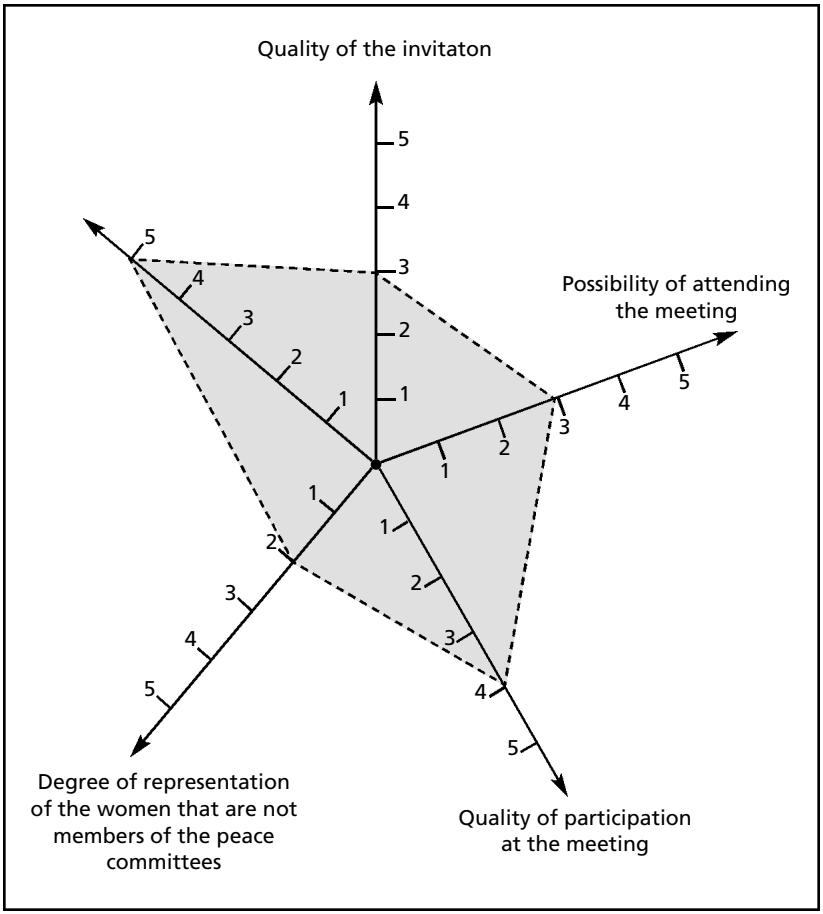
monitoring mainly consisted of informal feedback and small evaluations. For instance, a brief oral evaluation exercise was carried out at the end of the women's workshop, based on questions posed to participants. Similarly, after the decision-making meeting, evaluation forms were handed out (albeit with limited written response) and oral feedback was collected in an informal manner.

The completion of programme activities has led to a phase of more formalised evaluation, which is still ongoing. A participatory evaluation exercise has been initiated with local stakeholders to assess the *quality* of women's participation in NR conflict management. Indeed, it is not evident that merely granting women two seats in the peace committees will allow them to have their voice heard effectively. For the evaluation exercise, quality indicators have started to be drawn up in collaboration with the local women's association. These indicators will be used by the association to periodically assess the quality of women's participation in the peace committees[1]. The indicators identified so far relate to two key issues: the quality of the participation of the two women peace committee members; and the degree of representation and accountability of these two members towards the other women of the community. As for the former, indicators emerged so far include: the quality of the invitation (were women members formally invited to the meetings of the peace committee? If so, how long in advance? Were they consulted on the venue? etc.); the possibility of attending the meeting (have husbands publicly given their authorisation? etc.); and the quality of participation in the meetings (did women members talk? Were they listened to? Were their proposals adopted? etc.). The latter type of indicators are still being developed and relate mainly to ensuring that women that are not peace committee members feel that the presence of the two women members effectively increases their voice. This requires meetings to share information and opinions between the two women members and the other women. Besides creating representation and accountability, this would also enable non-member women to attend the meetings of the peace committees in case of impediment of women members (which happens relatively frequently due to domestic responsibilities and transportation

1. The assessments will consist of participatory discussions with men and women, in which these would give a value for each indicator (e.g. on a scale between 1, very bad, and 5, very good). Carrying out a baseline evaluation after the first activities of the peace committees involving women and periodically repeating the exercise would allow to monitor progress made.

problems). The tool that is being developed to monitor the quality of women's participation in NR conflict management is reproduced below (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Monitoring the quality of women's participation



NB. As the work on monitoring the quality of women's participation in the peace committees is still under way, the diagram above is merely intended to illustrate the methodology that is being used, and the values indicated in it do not reflect in any way the reality of Nioro.

5. Achievements and challenges

Consistent with the process approach adopted in the programme, the previous section analysed the stages of the process that were facilitated by the programme and the lessons that can be learned from it. This section examines the results that have been achieved through that process. It also analyses some open questions that this process has raised, and which involve further analysis and/or activities.

5.1 Integrating gender in NR conflict management

The main result is the integration of gender in NR conflict management, particularly through the increased participation and capacity of women. While this is inevitably a long-term process, as it involves changing entrenched attitudes and behaviour, programme activities do constitute an important step in this direction for several reasons.

Firstly, they have enabled women to discuss an issue – NR conflict management – that was previously considered within men's exclusive domain. In so doing, women have demonstrated the important contribution that they can make to NR conflict management through their skills and understanding of the issues involved. This has led to greater support, within communities at large, for addressing gender in conflict management and for accepting a greater participation of women in the relevant institutions. The process has also provided a forum for influential figures in the community to give their formal support to integrating gender in NR conflict management. This has made it more socially acceptable for women to participate in the activities and for others to support the process and its results.

Secondly, programme activities have facilitated the design and adoption of locally-owned and culturally appropriate strategies to integrate gender in NR conflict management. These strategies include the decision to reserve two seats in each peace committee for women, thus enabling women's participation in these institutions for the first time.

Thirdly, programme activities have increased women's awareness of and confidence in their abilities and knowledge. For instance, women's self-

confidence has been increased by overcoming their fear of acting outside culturally sanctioned (patriarchal) norms. This confidence/awareness effect is of great importance, as the first step to women's empowerment is their self-confidence in defining their own needs and priorities. Moreover, the activities have increased women's sense of belonging to a distinct social group with shared interests, thereby facilitating individual and collective action and enhancing their motivation to work to change existing circumstances (cf. Guijt and Shah, 1998).

The process has also established a space for women's discussion and networking on NR management issues. This network has great potential as a resource to support the implementation of the strategies and of capacity-building activities for women in other areas.

5.2 Other achievements

Besides contributing to integrating gender in NR conflict management, programme activities have achieved other important results. Firstly, they have enhanced the capacity of Jam Sahel to adopt a gender perspective, by increasing women's participation and the incorporation of women's views in Jam Sahel's action-research activities, by supporting the adoption of gender-sensitive participatory methodologies, and by mainstreaming gender in other projects of the NGO.

More generally, the activities concerning NR conflict management may have wider gender implications in other areas of social and family life. Thus, the implementation of the strategies, and the ensuing reduction of many obstacles to women's involvement in NR conflict management (such as the need for husband's permission, domestic workload, lack of access to training and to financial resources, and the weight of tradition), may contribute to broader social and cultural change and have positive spillovers on other areas of gender concern. Moreover, gender awareness-raising activities such as the programmes transmitted by local radio stations, although focussed on NR conflict management, may contribute to broader changes in perceptions and attitudes towards gender.

5.3 Open questions

5.3.1 The quality of women's participation in NR conflict management

While the decision to have women members on the peace committees is a very encouraging development, questions remain about the quality of the participation that this is likely to facilitate. As noted above, having two women members may not necessarily enable women to have their voices heard. Much will depend on the extent to which women's participation is really perceived as important and valuable by other peace committee members. The evaluation process described above (section 4.4) will enable to shed some light on how far women members actively participate in activities and debates, and on the degree to which this results in the empowerment of all women of the community. In any case, it is important to recognise that changes in attitudes and perceptions that are entrenched in local culture (and often internalised by women themselves) require long-term commitment and processes. Although (male) peace committee members have unanimously expressed their support for the process and its outcomes, and have themselves decided to include women in the committees, silent resistance and gender stereotypes may require a longer time to be overcome

5.3.2 Social differentiation among women

Although gender analysis often emphasises the relations between men and women, strong social differentiation exists among men and among women. An analysis of who has participated in programme activities, and of the extent to which these participants are representatives of the women from their community, is therefore needed. Preliminary observations suggest that there was a bias towards women from sedentary communities, especially educated women members of women associations. In this regard, while the process has been fairly successful in understanding differentiation between women (e.g. on the basis of social status, age, ethnicity, marital status and religion), it has not adequately distinguished between women when they participated in the key activities. This is due to the fact that women have mainly been grouped according to their geographical origin (*commune*) rather than to any other factor differentiating them. In some programme activities (e.g. in discussions concerning the gender strategies), the views of less influential women may have been overridden by those of others. In future programme activities, particular importance should be attached to supporting initiatives ensuring

the accountability of women members of the peace committees *vis-à-vis* the other women in their community.

5.3.3 Tensions and problems concerning the process

For many women, being involved in the process has entailed short-term negative effects, particularly increased tensions with their husbands and other family members and increased workload. Probably, these effects are – at least in part – inevitable in a process aimed at questioning existing gender roles through activities involving women. Further reflection may however be needed to examine whether the activities might have been designed and/or implemented differently, so as to minimise these effects.

5.3.4 Are the results sustainable?

A crucial issue concerns the long-term sustainability of the results of the programme. While the gender strategies were designed locally, external support and facilitation were needed to start and continue the process. Moreover, although local capacity to integrate gender into NR conflict management has been enhanced, the process does not appear to have gone far enough to become completely sustainable. Follow-up work with external support is therefore probably needed to support the planning and implementation of the activities identified in the strategies, as well as to assess the quality of participation. The danger is that if action does not follow soon, the process may lose momentum, and enthusiasm may gradually fade. Nonetheless, the process has prepared some very fertile ground and planted some very promising seeds. It is hoped that after such achievements this opportunity will not be lost.

6. Conclusion

This paper has described the experience of a participatory process to integrate gender into NR conflict management in the *cercle* of Nioro, Mali. The process has enabled men and women, as well as members of local conflict management institutions (the peace committees), to analyse the gender dimension of NR conflict management and to elaborate strategies to take this dimension into account within existing institutions and mechanisms. Such strategies include (but are not limited to) reserving two seats for women on the peace committees. This achievement constitutes an important first step of a longer-term process, the outcome of which will depend on the quality of women's participation in the committees. Therefore, continuing support is needed in Nioro to ensure the full implementation of the gender strategies and to monitor the quality of participation and progress made.

While the focus of the programme is to enhance the capacity of local men and women for NR conflict management, including supporting them in considering the gender dimension, the process may offer lessons for similar problems and processes elsewhere in West Africa and beyond. More generally, it may offer insights on concepts like "community", "representation" and "participation". Communities are often idealised in the literature, ignoring the profound differences, inequalities and conflicting interests that may exist at intra-community level. Community-based NR conflict management institutions (such as the peace committees) may not represent vast sectors of the community, including women. Participatory processes do not always ensure representativeness, as they may be mainly attended by the better educated and connected. As a result, community action plans adopted by these institutions and through these processes may not reflect the views and interests of all community members. Moreover, as for participatory processes facilitated by outsiders, questions remain as to the extent to which facilitators may unconsciously influence processes and outcomes. In the words of some authors:

> *"…Professionals must be astute and self-critical enough to recognise when community interventions become `part of the legitimisation process which ultimately supports existing social relations'* (Bryson

and Mowbray 1981)*, and hence further entrench community level inequality and powerlessness."* (Guijt and Shah 1998:8-9)

Another reflection that may be stimulated by this experience concerns the relationship between culture and development programmes. On the one hand, the experience shows the importance for development programmes to use processes and methods that are sensitive to, and respectful of, local culture. On the other hand, it also shows how inequitable cultural attitudes and the related power relations – such as women's exclusion from NR conflict management – may need to be questioned. Indeed, culture is not static and isolated, but continuously evolving as a result, among others, of socio-economic changes and of interactions with other cultures. However, it must be kept in mind that cultural change is a slow process that may require controversial issues to be addressed, as well as a long-term perspective and continuing support.

Ultimately, the experience of Nioro shows that effective, equitable and sustainable NR conflict management, whether by men or women, can only occur within a process owned and led by the local population, as expressed very eloquently in the statement below:

"You can bring us the culture of war in a plane and humanitarian aid in a truck, but you can't bring us the culture of peace, because it is a tree with its roots deep in our land" (Quote of village elder in Mozambique provided in Fisher *et al.* 2000:138).

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The Drylands Programme aims to contribute towards more effective and equitable management of natural resources in semi-arid Africa. It has a particular focus on decentralised management of natural resources, pastoral development, land tenure and resource access. Key objectives of the programme are to strengthen local capacity for sustainable resource management, by building effective and accountable local institutions; identify and promote national policies that legitimise and enable local-level decision making and authority; argue and lobby for global policies and institutions that support the development needs and priorities of dryland peoples.

It does this through four main activities: collaborative research with a range of partners in dryland African countries, training in participatory methods, policy advice to donor organisations, and information networking promoting links and learning between French and English-speaking Africa.

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