**Lessons Learned**

**From**

**Conflict, Social Capital and Managing Natural Resources**

By learning new empowered roles, the SANREM-trained local community leaders have brought about behavioral changes in community relations leading to attitudinal changes in the commune population as a whole. Future successes will be built on this cohort of local leaders, and their mobilization of social capital. These new leaders have learned to act on the behalf of their communities in the development of sustainable and profitable practices for decentralized NRM.

While SANREM has been working in Madiama, similar inter-village level experiments in decentralized NRM have taken place at the local level in Mali. In two cases, they have been assisted by locally based NGOs: SOS Sahel in Bankass and the Near East Foundation (NEF) in Douentza (Bocoum *et al.*, 2003). A third case, *Siwaa*, was supported by CRRA/Sikasso researchers in collaboration with extension personnel (Hilhorst and Aarnink, 1999). In all three cases, the NGO developed relations between the local population and government service agencies in support of co-management of natural resources. However, each evolved a different social infrastructure. In Bankass, the *Projet d'Appui à la gestion de l'environnement* (PAGE) formed no permanent inter-village association; they simply facilitated the linkage between government services and individual village associations. In the zone of Kelka (near Douentza), the NEF coordinated with government services to support a traditional multi-village association called *Waldé Kelka.* The CRRA/Sikasso in collaboration with the forestry and extension services helped develop a local forest co-management agreement among three villages. These cases confirm and reinforce the following lessons learned from the NRMAC experience in Madiama.

*Lesson #1*: Including all stakeholders is a necessary but problematic task. All four projects experienced difficulty maintaining sustained communications and assuring the full participation of women and pastoralists (particularly non-resident pastoralists) in their activities and decision making structures. Furthermore, participation is not limited to natural resource end users; customary authorities, government officials, technical service agents, and local NGOs should also be included. Accountability and sustained communication are necessary reinforcements for stakeholder inclusion.

*Lesson #2*: There is no single model for building social capital and developing local management agreements. The process must be iterative, allowing for the adaptive learning that takes a considerable amount of time (years) to bring all stakeholders together in an informed and voluntary manner, and to negotiate consensus on each component of an accord. As we have documented, the process needs time to evolve and mature, because building trust between groups is a time-consuming process.

*Lesson #3*: Project and partner personnel need to be well trained to encourage open

debate, foster consensus building and guide without leading. Respect for and recognition of local know-how is essential. This is something which we, as development agents can control, because respect and recognition depend on our own behavior regarding the population. This is as true for local leaders as it is for government service agents. Mistakes will be made and should be expected. They can be used as lessons. Training programs in conflict resolution and consensus building have made major contributions in this regard.

*Lesson #4*: Power relations and stakeholder interests need to be carefully taken into account. If the interests of any stakeholders, whether socially powerful or not, are ignored, full implementation of collective endeavors will be compromised. Training in conflict management can assist in bringing divisive issues into the open so that they can be confronted and managed.

Lesson #5: Development agents must focus interventions on developing synergy between the public and private sectors and on reinforcing the networks of local associations, cultivating horizontal bonds across communities, thereby facilitating the mobilization of viable, locally defined initiatives. This is the new agenda for research and development of community life in West Africa.