

**THE FOURTH REGIONAL WORKSHOP
ON NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN WEST AFRICA**

Niamey, October 12 - 17, 1998

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONTEXT

The fourth regional workshop on natural resource management (NRM) was held in the Palais des Congrès in Niamey in the Republic of Niger from October 12-17, 1998.

This workshop was a natural step in the regional dialogue and was initiated by the national NRM programs of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. The process began in 1992 with the first workshop of Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso. In 1993 and in 1995, Ouagadougou and Bamako hosted the workshop, respectively. During the last workshop, the participants strongly recommended that the policy makers be invited to the next workshop and that they be involved in the debates in order to be informed of the resulting progress, the constraints met, and possible ways to solve them in the future.

Accordingly, the Niamey workshop was characterized by the presence and participation of policy makers and senior decision makers responsible for NRM in their respective countries.

This workshop gathered more than 80 participants representing 16 different countries and several organizations and institutions, all of whom are directly involved in the implementation of NRM programs.

Natural resource management will here be understood as the proper husbandry of all natural resources, with the aim of ensuring: (i) enough sustenance for the present population, nutritionally, materially, and culturally, and (ii) that this is done in a sustainable manner in order that future generations also will be able to enjoy these benefits. In this framework, people, including their cultures, values and norms, are understood as the point of departure as well as the overall goal. In this sense, natural resource management (NRM) is closely related to the concept of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM).

The objectives of the Niamey workshop were to:

- (i) exchange NRM experiences among practitioners regarding the existing development strategies, as well as impacts on local populations and the environment;
- (ii) identify the constraints existing on a regional level and present their possible solutions to policy/decision makers;
- (iii) engage in a dialogue with policy/decision makers, and
- (iv) engage them.

PROCESS AND DISCUSSION

The Niamey workshop was split into two parts:

1. The first part, from October 12 to 14, was spent on presentations and work in groups, during which experiences were exchanged, constraints were identified, and solutions were looked for (identified); and
2. During the second part, from October 15 to 16, the results, constraints and recommendations within NRM were presented to the policy makers.

The subsequent debates focused on the following issues:

- guarantee of access and use rights;
- decentralization and NRM;
- cooperation, partnership (including co-management and participation), and funding;
- research adapted to NRM;
- monitoring and evaluation methods adapted to NRM; and
- role of NGOs.

Guarantee of Access and Use Rights

Concerning the issue of guarantee of access, experience has shown that natural resource management is based on two principles:

- allocation of space according to their natural resources; and
- empowerment of local populations in NRM.

Proper implementation of most NRM projects in recent years has been constrained by the following:

- lack of legal recognition of land ownership in rural areas;
- lack of land tenure legislation that takes customary rules into account ;
- lack of access of local populations to natural resources such as gazetted forests; and
- lack of a consultation and negotiation framework involving populations in conflict management.

The combination of the aforementioned factors led to lowered motivation among the rural populations, to decreased security of investments, and accordingly, to accelerated degradation of natural resources.

The participants in the workshop have recognized the need to develop an appropriate legal framework that allows:

- a formal definition of property and delineation of rural lands;
- access for the local population to management of public reserved areas;
- definition of master plans for the development of these areas; and

- recognition of the role and place of local organizations in the management of natural resources and related conflicts.

Experience has shown that such a legal framework should be based on local, national and regional realities and should be a prerequisite for successful NRM activities. It requires extensive consultation involving all stakeholders. The proposed legal framework is based on a number of successful experiences in the sub-region, including Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Mauritania and Niger. It is widely recognized that these experiences have not allowed an efficient and sustainable management of natural resources but have, at the same time, increased income. In particular, these experiences have led to social peace among populations with different cultures and economic activities.

Decentralization of Natural Resource Management

The workshop found that a prerequisite for sustainable management of natural resources is responsible behavior on the part of local communities through an appropriate legal and political framework. Decentralization, a component in the democratization process at the local level, is closely linked to NRM at the community level and to the modalities of implementing management plans.

The use of a participatory approach in NRM projects has indicated that villagers in numerous communities:

- are able to analyze their needs and their resources and to identify relevant actions;
- can organize themselves according to original and sustainable models in order to address their problems, if they are given the freedom to base their choices on their own experiences and cultures;
- have known for a long time how to work effectively, together with other villagers, towards solving common problems, granted that they possess real authority and effective power; and
- have the capacity to work as equal partners with government technical services if clear rules exist that are respected by these services.

These participatory methods have allowed the creation and strengthening of frameworks for joint action which, subsequently, may be scaled up.

Although some countries have made significant achievements, a number of problems remain:

- the mechanisms for decision-making for resource use are still centralized;
- confusion over the roles and prerogatives of the different stakeholders involved in the development and protection of resources is still a real problem; and
- there is a risk of emphasizing decentralization in rural development programs without taking sufficient account of the accumulated experiences of higher-scale NRM programs.

Cooperation and Partnership

These terms refer to the concepts of co-management and participation, which represent different aspects but lead to the same result: interaction of stakeholders in natural resource management on all societal levels (local, sub-regional, national and international).

Experience has shown how inadequate coordination, due to lack of cooperation and partnership, can lead to:

- duplication and overlapping of activities at local, sub-regional and national levels;
- similarity of objectives and different approaches that sometimes are contradictory;
- competition for funding for the same activities; and
- lack of learning from past experiences.

The key consequence of this is inequitable allocation of resources. Experiences shows that mechanisms for cooperation and partnership in NRM matters would lead to:

- increased transparency;
- optimal use of resources;
- enhanced management capability;
- scaling up; and
- clarification of the roles and functions of each partner.

Adapting Research to Natural Resource Management

Today, natural resource management is faced with technical problems which will lead to increased emphasis on research in order to ensure the sustainability of productive capital, greater knowledge of the environment and the relationships between its components, and optimal assessment of local resources.

The present situation regarding research is as follows:

- NRM is not taken sufficiently into account in research methods;
- there is an emphasis on sectoral research conducted in isolation;
- there is inadequate knowledge of the level of degradation, the human impact on natural resources and the productive potential of local resources.

However, there are some achievements in this area. One example is the experience of research methods and user committees in Mali.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The participants recognized the need for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) methods as tools of management, decision-making, and impact evaluation. Nevertheless, they observe that:

- there is lack of data on the outputs of development projects and programs;
- there is insufficient analysis of existing data that allow decision-making; and
- M&E is seen only as a tool of control.

Consequently, the lack of knowledge of project impacts makes it difficult to justify continued funding of the programs.

During the workshop, the participants were informed about a regional initiative implemented in a number of countries on the basis of recommendations of the workshop in Ouagadougou in 1993. This initiative led to the implementation of a monitoring and evaluation method. The impact of NRM activities is defined in terms of:

- rehabilitation of natural resources;
- improvement in the quality of life;
- reinforcement of local capacities, and
- creation and reinforcement of an enabling institutional environment.

The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations

The role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the implementation of NRM programs, as partners with the State and communities, was recognized by all participants, particularly in regards to the mobilization of the rural population. Concrete examples were described by representatives of NGOs. Nevertheless, there is a lack of recognition of the importance of NGOs, as well as the problems and constraints they face (including low management capacity and access to funds).

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WORKSHOP

Based on the above statements and observations, the policy makers have agreed to:

1. Continue and extend the implementation of appropriate legal frameworks, while taking into account traditional rights that can ensure a concerted, decentralized and thus sustainable management of natural resources with particular emphasis on access to natural resources, land tenure, management of pastoral areas and aquatic resources in coastal areas and management of conflicts (local, national, and sub-regional) regarding these resources;
2. Recognize decentralization as a mechanism which creates the basis for a sustainable NRM and ensures the effectiveness of the transfer of power and authorities to local jurisdictions by creating an appropriate institutional and legal environment;
3. Strengthen the capacities of communities to play their role in the planning and implementation of NRM actions as well as to enhance their responsibilities;
4. Create and develop mechanisms for the transfer of financial resources (fiscal, grants, and credits);

5. Integrate NRM in the process of decentralization;
6. Create the necessary conditions to reinforce and develop the partnership capacities among all stakeholders (including communities, technical services, NGOs, public administration, development partners, and private sector), and on all societal levels. This will follow from establishing suitable funding mechanisms for such cooperation;
7. Recognize the capacities and experiences of NGO interventions in communities and encourage them to become more efficient by providing easier access to funds;
8. Take into account the needs of NRM in research methods on national and sub-national levels by: (i) involving partners (including communities, individuals, and extension workers); (ii) reforming the curriculum for post-graduate research in order to better integrate the bio-physical, economical and social aspects of NRM; (iii) revising the criteria for evaluation of researchers in order to orient research towards the needs of communities; (iv) creating mechanisms that further private sector investment; (v) establishing a network aimed at distributing NRM research results; and (vi) integrating results and impacts identified by M&E in research methods;
9. Establish coherent M&E methods for all NRM project and program levels in order to measure the efficiency of activities and to determine their impact on rehabilitation of natural resources. Also, the methods should be introduced to measure the improvement of the quality of life, the reinforcement of local capacity, and the establishment of a favorable institutional environment; and
10. Ensure that NRM activities are conceptualized with a long term perspective in mind due to the slow processes associated with changes in values and behavior as well as with the complexities of biological and ecological cycles in nature.

PERSPECTIVES

The workshop has requested that the Minister of Agriculture and Livestock of Niger communicates the results of the workshop to his West African colleagues not present at this meeting in order to obtain their support for the above commitments.

The participants, including the policy makers, have shown a strong interest in this type of workshop as a framework for exchange of experiences, for reflections and for dialogue between all involved stakeholders in NRM. They have suggested:

- the establishment of a network of NRM practitioners using modern communication technologies, in particular electronic mail and web-sites;
- the exchange of experiences through study tours for technicians, producers, NGOs in the region in order to make better use of experiences;
- the creation of working groups and organization of thematic workshops for better preparation of future general meetings; and

- the choice of a place and a date of the next workshop after having consulted all relevant stakeholders, in particular upon consultation of the policy makers not present at this workshop.

Niamey, October 17, 1998