

Findings



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West Africa: Community Based Natural Resource Management

With their economies largely linked to agricultural production, most West African countries must battle simultaneously to alleviate widespread poverty, ensure food security and achieve environmentally sustainable economic development. This has to be accomplished against a background of high illiteracy rates, rapidly growing populations, low and erratic rainfall, inherently infertile soils, and development strategies which have had a strong urban bias. Under such conditions, traditional production systems are unable to sustain the population. Without significant change, land degradation will accelerate and the natural resource base on which agricultural production depends will continue to decline.

The efforts made in the 1970s and 1980s to tackle this problem were not particularly successful. They tended to focus too much on production and did not attempt to involve the local population in decision-making and management. Drawing on the lessons learned from these projects, governments, donors, and NGOs initiated a new generation of community-based, decentralized, multi-sectoral natural resource management (NRM) projects. Starting as a series of pilot operations in the late 1980s, this approach sought to ensure local community participation in the identification development and implementation of NRM projects, while building institutional capacity for effective resource use planning and human resource development.

Community-Based Approach

Over the past 10 years, the World Bank, other donors and NGOs have supported a series of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) projects in West Africa.

Aiming to enhance sustainable natural resource management through the empowerment of local communities and a redefinition of the role of government, CBNRM encourages a supportive national policy and legislative base, increases local capacity and

management skills, and facilitates community-level investments in simple low-cost responses to natural resource degradation and towards meeting basic rural needs.

The involvement of stakeholders in NRM projects has generated successful and sustainable results in several West African countries, most notably, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and Mali.

The CBNRM Methodology

In *Burkina Faso*, the Environmental Management project is based on the *gestion des terroirs* (community-based land management) approach developed in pilot programs supported by a range of NGOs and donors. The GT approach associates groups and communities with a traditionally recognized land area. It helps communities acquire effective skills and develop the local institutions necessary to implement ecologically sustainable land and natural resource management plans. Donors and other stakeholders agree on the need for incorporating several elements important for the sustainability of the project, notably environmental education (at all levels), land use laws and the decentralization of land management to the village level, and the development of income-generating projects falling within the mandate of the project.

The *gestion des terroirs* approach has been incorporated into the on-going GEF/Belgian government-funded West African Community-Based NRM and Wildlife Management Project in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and many other NRM projects in the area.

In *Benin*, the Natural Resource Management project (PGRN) undertook to assist the government in the management of river basins, reform of land use laws, management of classified forest, wildlife management, institutional support for land use forestry, the effective use of cartography, training and public awareness building activities. The project has put at the government's disposal a set of indicators and experiences that can be used to evaluate pilot activities and mainstream them through national development programs.

In *Mali*, the focus of the community-based efforts was to introduce a rational land use system and to halt and reverse the process of degradation of the natural resource base (soil, water, and natural vegetation) which was the greatest threat to agricultural growth. More effective monitoring systems enhanced the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and the Environment. The village-level activities have been integrated into the government's new decentralized land use framework. As with the Burkina Faso project, there has been a significant increase in implementation rates following the adoption of improved strategies to better involve a wider range of partners.

Lessons Learned

Flexibility and Adaptability: *At the community level*, the often limited planning capacity of the villages was insufficient to develop NRM plans to be forwarded to the

government. Through the community-based approach, all village-level activities are identified and implemented by the local communities with the assistance of project-trained facilitators. As a result, there is substantial local adaptation of the basic strategy to suit the local situation and needs. For example, in the dry, resource-poor areas of northern Sahel with high population pressures, communities tend to concentrate on stabilizing and improving the resource base. Further south, where resources are more plentiful, population pressure less but migration more active, communities tend to place greater emphasis on land tenure, land use zoning, and on establishing village boundaries.

Village Investments : The wide range of village-level investments identified by the local population have an excellent chance of being maintained and receiving long-term local support. In Benin and Mali, the initial set of pilot communities where the projects were implemented were expanded and the amount invested in each community was limited to facilitate this rapid expansion. A subject of active debate in Mali is the possibility of non-NRM activities also being financed.

Rapid Rural Appraisal Technique : The participatory rapid rural appraisal technique has been used effectively in assisting communities identify their priority concerns. This technique brings in marginalized groups in the communities (women, transients), and helps illiterate communities interact and negotiate with the "outside" world.

Conflict Resolution : The GT approach can facilitate the resolution of conflicts between and within communities regarding issues such as cropped land and boundary alignments, as well as disputes between settled agricultural communities and transient pastoralists. It can also quickly increase the capacity of communities to negotiate with the "outside."

Challenges

Implementation : The time required for local capacity building and the training requirements for local communities is often underestimated. This expanded time-horizon and additional costs need to be factored into the planning process. There is also a need for institutional support to facilitate the systematic reflection of village-level needs and priorities in national programs.

Community empowerment : Existing government and donor procedures often make it difficult for communities to assume responsibility for the management of their natural resources. If the program is to expand in the countries where it is being implemented, several fundamental changes are required: (i) simplified diagnostic and planning procedures; (ii) reduced scope of activities financed; (iii) increased involvement of other agencies in implementation; (iv) increased number of field teams to expand coverage; (v) improved operational linkages with agricultural extension staff; and (vi) greater delegation of financial management responsibilities to local communities.

Measuring Impact : Monitoring and evaluation systems cannot yet produce detailed quantitative information on the impact of investments. This is partially due to the varied nature of the village-level investments. Increased use of beneficiary assessment techniques to review impact and better management information systems will help in

this regard.

Improved linkages with Agricultural Services : There is substantial complementarity between CBNRM activities and agricultural extension , especially with regard to :

the priority resource management concerns identified by the population;

the GT-related community diagnostic and awareness building process which enhances interest in production -related messages and the use of technology; and

the use of agricultural extension services to provide targeted agricultural/environmental messages.

Impact

National and international interest and investment in the GT strategy is rapidly growing as the pilots prove successful. For example, at an International Meeting in Paris in 1994, the 14 countries involved in the Onchocerciasis Control Program (OCP) adopted the strategy for the settlement and development of areas liberated from River Blindness in West Africa. In addition, it is currently estimated that there are at least 80 projects totaling US\$ 500 million in Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger using the approach. For example, *at the national level*, the GT approach has been adopted by Burkina Faso's Ministry of Environment and Water for the management of the 10 most important forest and wildlife reserves in the south of the country. In Mali, the Ministry of Rural Development and Environment has used the approach for the development of a National Forestry Policy. The approach is also at the center of most National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs) in the sub-region.

At the regional level, within West Africa, there is an active informal network of natural resource management operations which supports the sharing of information and the cooperative analysis of operation experience. Initially based on three IDA-financed operations in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, it now includes other projects and countries. The network facilitates the participation in World Bank supervision missions of persons from neighboring countries familiar with the GT approach, organizes the circulation of an informal information bulletin, and holds annual meetings to discuss the practical aspects of implementing CBNRM projects.

Prospects

Although the *gestions de terroirs* approach is far from perfect--implementation is initially relatively slow and complex and costs high --it provides the best available strategy which simultaneously uses local empowerment and capacity building to respond to the immediate socioeconomic needs of the population as well as the long-term problems of sustainable land and natural resource management. Effective local capacity helps to accelerate the implementation of national programs.

Constraints to the GT approach are being tackled in a number of ways which include establishing national programs rather than limited projects, and involving a greater number of partners and agencies in the approach. The objective for many of the projects has been to increase their scope, which can be accomplished through increasing the number of field teams working on a short-term basis on CBNRM, simplifying the basic methodology, and reducing the overall spread of investments and complexity of operations.

World Bank. 1995. *West Africa Pilot Community Based Natural Resource and Wildlife Management Project (GEPRENAF)*. Staff Appraisal Report. Washington, D.C.

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