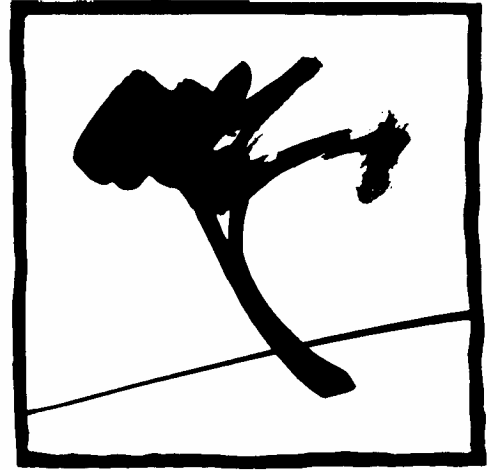


**CRAC-GRN
SOS SAHEL INTERNATIONAL**



“Cooking stones to extract the juice¹”

5 years of Autonomous Common property resources management at Takiéta

A Case study of the Association Kou Tayani
Takiéta Forest Reserve, Niger

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¹ From the Hausa proverb “*Mai hakuri yak an daf dutsi, har, ya sha roman shi*” meaning if you really want something and you have the patience and courage to keep trying then you will succeed.

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1.0 Introduction

In the field of Natural Resource Management (NRM) the Shared Management of Common Property Resources presents a particular development challenge; linking as it does ‘people’, ‘poverty-alleviation’ and the ‘sustainable joint management of the natural resources’ on which they depend. Despite the interest, the investment, the rhetoric and the general acceptance of ‘participatory’ development theory, concrete examples of successful shared management of common property resources remain relatively few and largely un-capitalised. This is unfortunate as current accelerating trends towards privatisation through agricultural expansion and/or appropriation give real cause for concern; particularly for fragile pastoral production systems.

In the past, common property resources were convenient ‘grey areas’ of local management but now, due to scarcity of resources and changing land tenure issues; they have become a major arena for competition and conflict for access and control among multiple user/interest groups. The very concept of ‘common property’ recognises that there are multiple users and uses involved. Therefore, by extension, management decision-making, if it is to be equitable, also has to be **inclusive**: the result of collaboration and partnership, recognising rights and sharing responsibilities between different interest groups. Long experience has clearly shown that technical options alone are never enough to make management work. There is an urgent need to put stakeholders at the heart of the decision-making process in order to address the complex management of common property resources from a socio-organisation point of view.

This article describes an on-going practical example of local stakeholders working together towards shared management of a strategic ‘common’ resource: the KouTayani Association of Zinder Region, Niger in West Africa. It tries to give a practical as well as theoretical view of the autonomous evolution of this local management structure and its management over a five year period. The experience is presented here, not as a model, rather as an illustration of the complex socio-political environment in which shared management takes place; raising the types of issues that may confront local management structures in reality. It highlights the need to create an enabling environment in which effective, decentralised and equitable local management can take place; stressing how crucial it is to invest in the long-term viability of collaborative ‘local’ management through inclusive processes and appropriate social communication strategies.

2.0 The Context

2.1 National Context

Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world. Following a long and difficult period of political instability characterised by alternating military and democratic regimes, the country is presently in a recovery phase both politically and economically. The present government was democratically elected in 1999 (and for a second mandate in 2004) and functions according to the governance principle of the separation of legislative, judiciary and executive powers.

Niger has a population of just under 11 million people (2001 census), 85% of whom are rural based. The annual population growth rate is 3.3% and this, combined with the already delicate natural resource base and highly unpredictable climatic conditions renders local, largely family based, production systems extremely fragile. Relations between the three main production systems, Agriculture, Livestock production and Forestry, are by nature complementary even if areas of synergy between sectors in the past have begun to disappear and conflicts become more frequent and violent. Niger is by vocation pastoral territory and there is a great deal of transhumant movement between the ‘Pastoral Zone’ in the north, through the ‘Agro-pastoral/intermediary zone’ and the ‘Agricultural Zone’ in the South as well as across the international frontiers with Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Burkina.

In terms of land tenure, Niger is unique in the Sub-Region in that the principles determining and securing the land tenure rights and responsibilities of all rural producers in Niger are laid down in a text known as the Code Rural; an umbrella text which, in theory, guides the orientation and contents of and is completed by, a series of sectoral texts. This innovative text also foresaw the institutional network necessary for the application and modification of the Code Rural text over time from community to national level and this is currently in the painstaking process of being put in place.

The Code Rural process is complemented by the parallel administrative reform, also originating in the 90's, known as decentralisation. The process of decentralisation, repeatedly put into suspended animation following successive military coups, has been reanimated and in recent years has advanced slowly but surely. In 2004 legislative elections took place and with the process of communalisation underway, the declared policy of political decentralisation including decentralised natural resource management has become a reality; all be it one severely hampered by lack of finances.

At the outset of the experience at Takiéta, described below, decentralisation as a political process was on the agenda but far from being a reality. However, the very fact that the process was underway meant that the policy and legislative environment in Niger was conducive to such experiments. Examples providing practical lessons on how power and responsibility can be most effectively transferred back to local people were recognisable elements on the government's agenda.

2.2 Takiéta Forest Reserve

Takiéta Forest Reserve is located in the agro-pastoral zone of the department of Zinder, Niger. The area is typically 'Sahelian' with annual rainfall between 250-400mm which is highly variable in time and space. Covering an area of 6,720ha, the Forest Reserve represents the largest non-cultivated area in the region and is regarded by both resident and non-resident users as an important *de facto* 'common' silvo-pastoral resource in a zone otherwise entirely occupied by fields.

Figure 1: Location of the Takiéta Forest Reserve



Created in the 1950's and theoretically owned, managed and protected by the State, the reserve became progressively subject to uncontrolled and destructive exploitation by local people and outsiders, with unchecked and rapidly expanding agricultural clearance taking place both at the boundaries of the forest and in the forest itself. In addition, pressure on the rapidly dwindling and degraded pastoral resources within the reserve was increasing as sedentary populations diversified into livestock production (which brought them into increased competition with transhumant pastoral groups). This *de facto* common property resource (through absence of management /presence of the state) was also

threatened by an influential local 'de-reservation lobby' aiming to privatise the land for individual profit.

2.3 The Takiéta Joint Forest Management Project

The TJFMP was set up by SOS Sahel UK in 1995 at the request of the Government of Niger. Its mandate was to promote a process leading to local sustainable decentralised management of the Takiéta Forest Reserve, taking into account all the different user groups and draw lessons from the experience². In the definition of its intervention strategy, the project profited from a number of ‘participatory’ NRM experiences from Niger and elsewhere which, enabled the team to analyse how approaches taken by external agencies ultimately influence the capacity of the ‘local managers’ to effectively continue to manage in the ‘post-project’ period.

Through this analysis and its own ‘learning through action’ process, the organisation was able to formulate a number of ‘Guiding Principles’ that simultaneously determined the approach taken by the project and how it evolved over time.

2.3.1 TJFMP Credo and Principles

The credo of the TJFMP was that the different interest groups dependant on natural resources (particularly common property resources) should be at the centre of the decision-making process concerning their future. It’s for the stakeholders to discuss, negotiate and make decisions together leading to sustainable management. In order to be able to accompany this process, external ‘facilitating’ bodies such as the TJFMP, need to have strong working principles and values within which the actors are free to reflect, negotiate, organise themselves and make informed decisions.

The TJFMP was guided by the following fundamental principles:

Concerning the implementation of activities...

- **Facilitation** : Projects are only temporary facilitators, accompanying autonomous local processes;
- **Process** : The adoption of a ‘process approach’ in which nothing is preconceived and everything is discovered together with the partners;
- **Learning through Doing**: The recognition, systematisation and analysis of local knowledge and practices as well as responsibility and capacity building for individuals, communities and institutions are prerequisites;
- « **Persuasion by inclusion** » : Obligation to persuade all the actors concerned to participate throughout the process by ensuring that the necessary useful information is available to them;
- **Sustainability**: All actions need to clearly take into consideration questions of durability, evolution and autonomy;
- **M&E by the actors**: Create the conditions necessary for internal monitoring & auto-evaluation.
- **Capitalising on experiences (positive & negative)**: should aim to strategically influence policies and strategies.

Concerning the NRM process...

- **Equity & Inclusion**: The equitable, legitimate and responsible representation of all stakeholders (particularly marginalised groups) is a prerequisite;
- **Context**: The management of a given resource should be tackled in relation to its wider role in the local socio-economic context;
- **Knowing and exercising one’s rights**: Individuals, communities and institutions need to know and understand their NRM rights and be empowered through exercising these rights;
- **A Sense of Ownership**: The objectives and modalities of management must reflect the needs, interests and preoccupations of all the different users and be designed and ‘owned’ by them;

² Since Takiéta forest had officially been set aside by law as a reserve the starting point for management was one where usufruct rights were officially accorded to local people but no more. However with the project “carte blanche” had been given by the government to come up with new forms of management to be decided by all the various actors.

- **Social Communication:** Flexibility and permanent dialogue (collaboration and negotiation) between actors are required in order to critically question on-going processes and change tack as a result are essential characteristics of the process;
- **Adaptation:** Any management system must have the flexibility to change and evolve when the circumstances require that it do so.

2.3.2 Translating Principles into a Strategic Approach

Restricting its role to that of facilitation, meant that the project too became a ‘learner’ in the process and that its ‘timetable’ was that of the stakeholders. The project felt that this was necessary in order to better demonstrate the existing capacity of actors to negotiate, organise and manage, without external support (or ‘interference’), as long as local conditions were favourable.

With this in mind, the TJFMP strategic approach can be summarised as follows:

- Promote **Inclusive Processes** in which all groups have a legitimate place at the negotiation table and the weakest groups have the capacity building support necessary to better make their voices heard.
- Recognise that management is a **long term process of evolution** in which external organisations are only temporary partners and should not be active in decision-making.
- Be sincere in the **belief in and respect for peoples rights/capacities** to decide for themselves in an informed way throughout the management process;
- **Invest the time necessary** to facilitate the emergence and establishment of strong locally driven processes: giving people time to reflect and make informed decisions.
- Understand that **facilitating (not ‘manipulating’)** means **refraining from directing** or controlling the process. It recognises the importance of being neutral and supporting the creation of a framework where actors themselves can negotiate; where nothing is preconceived and everything is discovered collectively.
- Aim that all actions and activities **reinforce the sense of independent local capacity to manage** by starting with what people together know, their joint analysis of a situation and options open to them.
- Stress should be on **learning by experience** where mistakes as well as successes can be positive learning experiences as long as they are analysed and action taken.

3.0 The Organisational Process Followed

3.1 The Challenges and Strategies Adopted to face them

From the outset, the TJFMP had a number of preoccupations concerning the quality of the socio-organisational process to be facilitated; particularly relating to the capacity of all stakeholder groups to:

1. Analyse and, where necessary, challenge traditional concepts and behaviour relating to resource management;
2. Actively participate in decision-making processes;
3. Define new roles and inclusive/representative structures compatible with their management objectives;
4. Reinforce dynamic social communication systems for information exchange, collaboration and negotiation

Thus, fundamental aspects such as the equitable representation of stakeholders and the creation of a neutral environment conducive to collaboration and negotiation between these stakeholders were priorities. These preoccupations and the strategies adopted are summarised below:

CHALLENGES	STRATEGIES ADOPTED
<i>1. How to fully involve all social groups (particularly Nomads/transhumants and women) in the process of collaboration and negotiation for the joint management of common resources?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Promotion of good systems of social communication ☞ Groups recognising and giving value to existing local practices and capacities and then learning how they might reinforce them and innovate; ☞ Make the actors fully responsible in the process (self-selection, auto-analysis, decision-making and negotiation) ☞ Building up self confidence through first analysing what one wants/needs, how to have it and knowledge of rights and responsibilities ; ☞ Defining and making an informed choice about new and existing communication

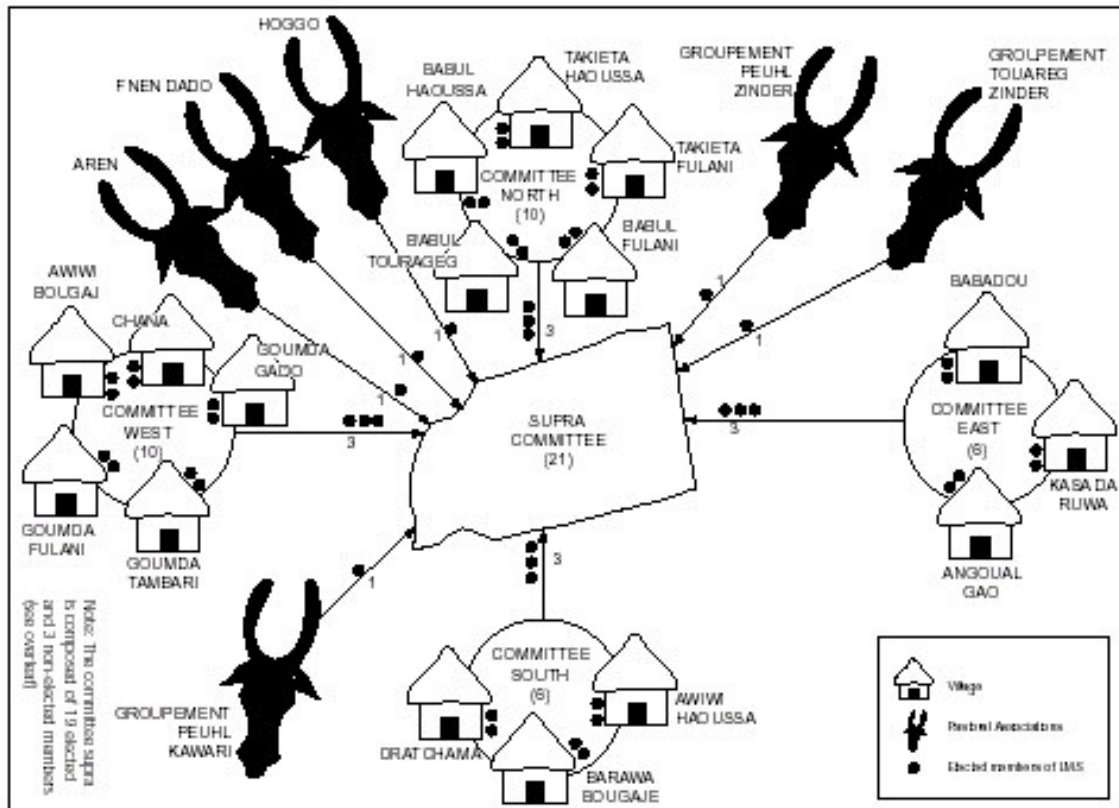
	channels adapted to the needs of mobile [pastoral] groups.
2. How to ensure that other stronger actors perceive the need for inclusion and equity amongst the different stakeholders; when certain fear losing power and others fear being exposed as weak?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Raise the perceived status of the « weakest » in the eyes of the « strongest » by means of information/direct contact/communication and training; ☞ Self-confidence and capacity building for weaker groups and at the same time reason with the stronger groups (better understanding of the situation in all its complexity, the rights and stakes for other groups); ☞ Look for mechanisms helping to establish and maintain a power balance between groups during negotiations ☞ Lobby for the common good rather than for one or another of the groups involved ☞ Bring stronger groups to the understanding that the exchange of ideas and collective decision-making doesn't affect their perceived power or credibility; rather that improves their status in the eyes of others including the less powerful. ☞ Ensure that each stakeholder group has the opportunity to analyse its situations, better identify its needs and interests but also those of others in order to be able to discuss and negotiate with them ☞ Follow a process of collective learning by doing through which the stakeholders are encouraged to discover the advantages of collaborating ; ☞ Avoid confusion between the terms 'equity' et 'equality' (promote the idea that collaboration and negotiation between actors doesn't necessarily reflect on their respective social status. ☞ Pay attention to the effective and efficient representation of each group (avoid superficial representation for 'the form', by ensuring that each group has the necessary information to enable it to judge the stakes and the role that should be played in the process; ☞ Bring others to understand the interest in having other groups well represented.
3. How to create a culture conducive to discussion, negotiation et collective decision-making?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Individual reflection is a prerequisite to better understanding the stakes and the context and being able to negotiate; ☞ Create a neutral environment or framework (either physical or virtual), defined in a consensual manner; ☞ The internal rules and methodology for conducting meetings/discussions are defined consensually, clearly understood and applied for everyone. ☞ Ensure that the discussion process is/will always be regularly informed concerning the evolution of the legislative context. ☞ React in a way that promotes collective learning by doing and help put in place mechanisms that ensure the flexibility of the system and the possibility of changing direction and decisions when necessary. ☞ Promote a freer vision of land-use or the concept of « action space » rather than a narrow geographical fix. ☞ Help stakeholders to recognise and valorise existing experience and then modify/build new systems on them.
4. How to guarantee the durability of the local dynamic created, through the qualities of legitimacy and legality?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Ensure that during the process all actions and decisions are taken in a legitimate way ☞ Give priority to aspects related to legitimacy in order to reinforce the sense of collective responsibility (ownership et accountability) before necessarily looking for legality; ☞ Ensure that the system is flexible enough to allow the opportunities offered by changes in the context (new or modified legislation, new partnerships etc...) to be exploited. ☞ Encourage the establishment of a strong system of social communication (circulation of information, maintaining good collaborative relations) ☞ Keep the system flexible, capable of questioning itself and evolving in order to be able to adapt to new elements in the context (ability to respond to opportunities, to change the orientation according to new information or developments)

3.2 The major steps in the process

The process followed at Takiéta evolved as a series of steps which took place between 1997 and 2000, the results of one step defining the next. With the advantage of retrospect these are present below in summarised form:

1. Resource and Stakeholder Identification. Clear identification of the resources concerned and all direct and indirect stakeholders.
2. Informed Debate at Individual Stakeholder Level: This involved an analysis by each group of the natural resources and the role that they play in their system of production. It covered:

- NRM strategies/roles from a historical point of view;
- The current situation/problems and causes;
- Decentralisation: discussion of the stakes and perspectives offered for local management;
- Interest in pursuing dialogue with other actors concerning the problem and future options,
- The strategic importance of the resource and initial ideas (and concerns) related to management and collaborating with others.



3. Sharing Information: Points of view from the different stakeholder groups were collated without comment and shared to give everyone a better idea of various opinions on the matter.
4. Multi Stakeholder Workshops: 180-200 representatives³ debated on a variety of subjects from the situation, the perspectives, consensus on the governing principles of future shared management and the process to be followed towards the organisation of the Local Management Structure (LMS).

Figure 2: *The Local Management Structure*

5. Election of delegates to the Local Management Structure (LMS) This was carried out internally within each stakeholder group according to criteria and the modalities agreed in the stakeholder workshops.
6. Preliminary meetings of all the delegates to the LMS: These meetings allowed delegates to get to know each other, share information and plan.
7. Meetings concerning the natural resources and how to manage them: Information regarding the natural resources and their potential based on local inventory methods and base maps, was collected analysed and shared. In addition an exhaustive list of users and uses was produced. On the basis of the information generated, basic rules and regulations for good governance of the existing resources were progressively drafted. Options for improving the resource over time were also explored and a proposed management document was drafted
8. Reinforcing relations and social communication systems: Formal and informal links were

³ Representatives were locally selected delegates from all known stakeholders. This included people from pastoralist groups, associations, villages, local authorities & administration and government services.

established/reinforced by the LMS through a series of visits to the authorities, government services and other partners including pastoral associations from Nigeria.

9. Stakeholder Review Workshop: The proposed management document was presented to all stakeholders for review, discussion and final amendment.
10. Official Recognition of the Status of the Association: The LMS was formally recognised by the state as the 'Kou Tayani Association'⁴ with a mandate to manage the Forest Reserve.
11. Official Submission of the Management Document The management document was presented to the local regional authorities asking for legal recognition to execute their management plan⁵ and subsequently 6 months of autonomous management took place before the closure of the project.
12. End of Project&.....continuation of the process.....

3.3 The situation at the end of the project

The consultative process amongst stakeholders concerning the shared management of the resource 'started' with the first major workshop in early 1997. By November 1998 the elected LMS delegates were united for the first time. Approximately 15 months later the LMS had become a functional and legally recognised 'Association' of local stakeholders sharing the collective aim of rational management of the resource for the benefit of all the users groups, with its own internal rules and regulations and a locally defined and sanctioned management plan for the resource, regarded as legitimate by both the user groups that created it and the State.

Though the preparatory work by the project and initial round of collaboration had involved a serious investment of time and effort, the resulting structure once created lost very little time in organising itself and producing encouraging results. The Association was in communication with and answerable to the base and recognised as an actor in dialogue with the local and national authorities. It was treated with curiosity by outsiders, with pride by the communities involved and was tolerated but feared⁶ by certain groups within the local socio-political environment. At the end of the project, the Forestry Service, as the Associations State partner, signed an agreement clearly outlining its support for and obligations concerning the association and the participatory management process in the form of a formal statement of roles and relations and support.

4.0 Kou Tayani Association after 5 years of Autonomy.

In the following 5 years (up to the point of writing this article), members have continued to hold regular meetings, make decisions, plan, budget and carry out numerous activities (such as local seedling production, planting, pasture improvement, soil and water conservation work) in the area in collaboration with the local population which regularly mobilised itself behind the association on a purely voluntary basis. Development of the resource in terms of honey production, fishing and the creation of rural fuel-wood lots also took place. In short, the local stakeholders through their association have carried out more effective and serious management activities in five years than the Forest Department has in 40! Some of these are shown in the box below.

⁴ The Association obtained legal status by being recognised through a national decree signed on 14th April 2000 No 104/MI/AT/DAPJ/SA

⁵ Legal recognition to manage was obtained after the closure of the project through the signature of a regional decree (No 053/PZ) signed on 25th September 2000 which gave it the right to autonomously manage the Forest Reserve of Takiéta according to its own locally defined and agreed management plan. However, prior to this the Association was already managing with the full concordance of the local authorities. The reason that the official decree this took so long to obtain was that it was the first time that something of this nature had ever occurred

⁶ It was feared by local 'leaders' as they were unaccustomed and felt uncomfortable with large scale collaborative and therefore powerful initiatives from the base which up to this point in time had not occurred.

Box 1 : A summary of some of the work carried out by Kou Tayani in five years

	2001	2002	2003	2004	Comments
Meetings	Over 75	Over 100	Over 90	Over 100	An estimate made by extrapolation
Micro-catchments	5,876	1,654	2,848	2,637	All Micro-catchments are built on a voluntary basis
Trees Planted	14,776	33,529	23,706	14,000	In 2002 and 2003 many trees were provided by the presidents' special development programme in addition to the seedlings produced
Seedlings Produced	20,000	10,000	17,000	15,000	All seedlings produced in surrounding villages for the Association. In 2004 one thousand seedlings were distributed free of charge to surrounding villages
Honey Production	Training	20 litres	35 litres	72 litres	Most honey is used for publicity purposes
Production of fish	2,046 Kg	4,342 Kg	3,758 Kg .	12,500 Kg	Restocking took place in 2002
Rehabilitated Forest	50 hectares	80 hectares	60 hectares	55 hectares	Selected areas of degraded forest are rehabilitated on a yearly basis. This involves reseedling, planting (where necessary) of trees and selective weeding
Fuel-Wood Produced in stacked cubic metres	1,825 M ³	2,228M ³	824 M ³	1,138 M ³	Wood is cut from a selected area each year on a rotational basis and a certain number of branches of an agreed maximum diameter are selected from each tree.

Note : the above activities are a mix of new initiatives (honey/fish/fuelwood production, meetings and forest rehabilitation) since 2000 and more classic old activities (Seedling production, Tree planting and Microcatchments) introduced by the forestry services since the 1960's.

5.0 Analysis after 5 years of autonomous evolution

In addition to the technical management activities described above, many aspects related to the **organisational challenge** of 'shared' management by multiple stakeholders have had to be and are still being worked through. Noted below are some of the positive and negative 'experiences' of the association in the past 5 years and some of the lessons they have learned.

5.1 Positive experiences related to the internal functioning of the structure:

- Delegates who proved to be inadequate for their role have been replaced either by or in collaboration with, their communities or institutions. This has improved the internal capacity of the structure and the circulation of information. The fact that association was able to carry out such a delicate exercise is very positive. ***The quality and role of delegates is the foundation of good communication and management.***
- The association has organised its own study visits within Niger and link ups with partners and negotiated training in different management techniques such as honey-production; fuel-wood lot management, conflict management and monitoring and evaluation. ***It is important to know what support/skills you need and how to get them.***
- Built in mechanisms for feedback and control are frequently used. For example
 - Local groups have exercised their rights to examine the associations' accounts.
 - Organised feedback opposing proposed actions by the association has taken place. As an example a demonstration was orchestrated concerning the proposed application of a previously agreed by-law.
 - The recommendations made at General Assemblies have generally been applied even

though some of them were difficult and delicate to implement⁷

- **Feedback mechanisms and the flexibility to respond to them need to be built into the system.**
- Initially the association underestimated the importance of General Assemblies but experience from the three held so far has demonstrated the importance of this tool for reinforcing relations between the structure and the base as well as providing quality, binding solutions to problems beyond the authority of the management structure alone. **Bringing actors together to discuss issues and make collective recommendations is an extremely powerful tool,**
- The Forestry Service as an institution, despite initial reservations, now recognises the credibility of the association as a result of its proven capacity to organise physical improvement of the resource on a large scale as well as rationally controlling exploitation. **Actions speak louder than words**

5.2 Negative experiences related to the internal functioning of the structure:

- The original two-tiered structure involving geographical sub-committees as intermediate decision-making forums was never established (logistically and technically more cumbersome), and this has meant that decision-making has not always been able to take place at the right level or on time. **Subsidiarity in decision-making means that problems can be solved more effectively.**
- Some delegates have difficulties when their communities or structures don't play their roles correctly by refusing to support or inadequately supporting his/her communication/mobilisation efforts. **The function of delegates is to relay information between the community/institution and the management structure not to decide in the place of either. Every group has roles and responsibilities within the system which they need to be clear about and ready to accept.**
- The members of the executive committee have tended to allocate (financially) interesting 'posts' and 'activities' to themselves rather than to ordinary 'members', which would be strategically more appropriate for reinforcing local links and relations. **While profiting from your position is generally bad practice, it needs to be recognised that there are limits to voluntary work.**
- Some delegates abused their positions to profit from the resource. They were denounced by the associations own forest guards and named and sanctioned by the general assembly. **No one is above the law: the pressure between different groups, the existence of clear control and sanction safe-guards and mechanisms are essential.**
- In cases where communication has been too weak, information has circulated by **rumour** and has presented problems for the association. One experience laid the association open to **unsubstantiated** claims of financial irregularities, which the associations' detractors were quick to exploit. **Credibility is easily damaged even by false information; it follows that good communication systems are essential.**

5.3 Positive experiences related to the external environment:

- Over and above meeting management costs, a percentage of revenue gained from the exploitation of the resource is reinvested in local development initiatives. This encourages people to support continued management by the association. **Direct and indirect benefit sharing by stakeholders should be an integral component of the management system**
- Through visits received and visits made by the association, it has learned how to present itself and its work, profited from exchanges with others and made friends and allies. **Institutions need to build up and maintain their own support network**
- The association has learnt how to deal with difficult authorities and politicians and has become increasingly capable of defending itself against local power-play⁸. **Local organisations need to be strong and confident enough to defend their rights as well as the interests of those they represent.**

⁷ Examples include: exclusion of non functional associations (Hoggo), firing of the treasurer due to bad management practices and sanctioning of abuse of position by delegates.

⁸ An illustrative example here is the case of the Minister of Agricultural Development who visited Takiéta Forest in 2001 and who decreed that Market gardening (with the aid of motorised pumps) should take place around the semi permanent lake of Babul situated within the reserve. The Association was able to annul the ruling of this verbal decree by showing that Babul Lake was already effectively managed for other purposes (fishing, livestock watering, small scale market gardening) and that motorised market gardening would have negative impacts for the other activities.

- The association successfully refused to submit to a national level project that tried to graft itself onto this shared management initiative in order ‘support it’ by being able to defend its own principles and ways of doing things. The projects’ idea had been to ignore the association and replace it with its own ‘top-down’, formulaic model of forest management. Negotiations took place and the project agreed to the association’s conditions of partnership and quietly incorporated the ‘new strategy’ learned into its work elsewhere. ***Knowing who you are, what your role is and that you have popular support gives the strength and confidence necessary to defend yourself from being bullied.***

5.4 Negative experiences related to the external environment:

- The association was subject to abuse of power and trust when Forestry Service agents (supposed allies) extorted money on the pretext of paying for fictive services⁹ carried out apparently in the forest departments’ name. This experience was also negative internally as it meant that the Association had let itself be pushed into not respecting its own financial and decision-making procedures just because the matter concerned ‘a figure of influence’. Still, in the end it was a positive learning experience because, in resolving the situation the association used its partners for moral support/advice and subsequently resolved the issue with the Regional Director of Forests. ***Local institutions need to have mechanisms that help them avoid abuse by influential people. These include having good procedures and using them and always asking for second opinions.***
- The Forest Service failed (initially) to provide technical and monitoring support when solicited due to lack of interest by individual agents, compounded by the institutional weakness of the service. ***It is important for organisations to know their partners and recognise that they too have weaknesses.***
- Projects with ‘money-to-spend’ have been attracted to the association and in trying to provide ‘support’ have in fact tended to distract it from its real function. ‘Easy’ money encourages ‘donor chasing’ which distracts from the real issues and is completely negative in terms of real local development. ***Money can be useful but it can also very easily distract from real objectives.***

6.0 Learning from experience

6.1 Lessons Learnt

This concluding section draws out some of the broader lessons learnt from the experience at Takiéta that might serve as aspects to be considered or points for debate. The points have been regrouped under different thematic headings.

6.1.1 Social Communication

Effective social communication takes time to put in place and is dynamic. It is the foundation/framework for good governance and the ‘oil’ that lubricates the workings of the shared management ‘machine’. Inclusive processes and effective social communication are prerequisites to facilitating the resolution of potentially conflictual situations inherent in shared management of common property resources. Social communication helps ensure the circulation of information and create a culture of transparency, necessary for the creation/reinforcing of constructive relations between actors. It promotes inclusion (consensual decisions and choices) and enables diverse socio-political realities to be better taken into account and dealt with, thus ensuring that decisions and choices made are more appropriate. When flexibility and capacity to adapt are inherent in the management system, people take control of their own development knowing that there are no set answers to problems; that it is rather a process of learning from experience where risk taking and mistakes are positive as long as you learn from them.

An appreciation of how social relations change over time is shown schematically in the table over leaf.

⁹ The fictive service was supposedly restocking the lake with fingerlings although this had never been asked for at this point in time and it is very doubtful as to whether it took place at all!

Social relations a changing dynamic over time	
A the start of the intervention at Takiéta	After 5 years of autonomous management
Social relations within villages were rather weak due mainly to very little social networking to solve community problems. This weak social networking was also very much due previous Top Down interventions from other projects	Social networking within villages has dramatically improved as villagers need to decide what happens in the forest. There have also been a many cases of setting up other community management initiatives (tree nurseries, water management...)
Social relations between sedentary and pastoral groups were very poor and projects/government services were afraid to bring the two groups together in case the sparks would fly !	Relations between sedentary and pastoral groups have dramatically improved. As one person commented in a recent meeting “Before the arrival of the project we barely saw each other except to resolve a conflict. Now we’re invited to each others wedding and baptisms”
Delegates chosen by communities often tended to be either the chiefs ‘dogs body’ or the local village idiot even though it was obvious that these people could not effectively fulfil the role required	Over time non functional delegates have been replaced by people who properly represent their base
Voting tended to give results where social loyalty was obviously the winner	Voting is more and more based on peoples capacity to effectively carry out the function
Women were freely chosen by local people to act as delegates along with men ¹⁰ .	Women are seen as less vociferous equal partners along with the men

In setting up an effective, legitimate communication system all a project can do is to :

- Ensure that the maximum amount of information reaches the base and that people have a choice of doing or not doing;
- Ensure that people understand the why and the what of their choice and the consequences of a poor choice;
- Ensure that people have time to analyse the role required and the capacities needed to fill it.
- Encourage people to build the necessary mechanisms into the system to ensure that delegates can be changed when necessary.
- Let people chose and live with their choice; it’s that fastest way to bring about real behavioural change.
- Let the creation of committees and other important management organs not be the first step in the process, rather the result of careful preparatory work through which people themselves become more conscious about the stakes for themselves and those around them....then people can be elected to management committees etc.
- Make actors aware that people’s perceptions of the stakes change over time and their participation may well reflect this evolution.

6.1.2 Facilitation

From past experience it is clear that an outside agency’s understanding and approach towards ‘Shared Management Initiatives’ contributes strongly to the subsequent success or failure of that initiative. The more prescriptive, technical or directive the intervention the less likelihood of success even if the technical aspects are sound and people ‘participate’. Capacity building for management starts from the moment of problem analysis and, particularly in the case of common property resources, continues through a permanent process of negotiation between stakeholders. The role of outsiders should be to accompany autonomous processes; to facilitate without piloting, driving or manipulating. This means:

- believing in and respecting the capacity of people to develop themselves and bring about

¹⁰ Though sceptical at first the men when asked what role the women would play agreed that in fact it was the same role as them – decision making for management. Women tended to quiet but attentive during the discussions unless asked. When questioned about this they said they were just getting used to participating in such a structure along with men and weren’t quite sure how to act

- constructive change together.
- having strong principles, respecting them and having the ‘sang-froid’ to apply them
- being ready to pose the necessary questions and promote analysis/reflection
- allow time for peoples reflection, discussion and decision-making.
- creating the conditions in which actors themselves decide what the stakes are and their level of commitment to a common process. : creating ownership

What the project knows or understands is not as important as what people know and the quality of the analysis they are capable of carrying out. It is important not distance the management institution from the local reality: too much money and ‘support’ can be a distraction rather than a facilitating agent: a little support/money well placed is more effective than ‘throwing the package’ all at once!

6.1.3 Time

If the facilitating organisation is not willing or able to invest the time necessary to allow people to control the decision-making process it is better not to start! The process will take the time it takes: but time invested at the beginning will facilitate the process later on and lead to real sustainable local development.

6.1.4 Actors and Partners

- If the inclusion of actors is real and sincerely done, even the most negative or reluctant will nearly always voluntarily go with the process, even if it is against some of their immediate to long term personal interests (persuasion by inclusion and popular demand).
- The local legitimacy of decision-making processes, management structures and rules and regulations are more important than their legality.
- It must be understood that people are only human! Therefore :
 - The behaviour and attitude of actors change with their perception of the stakes at a given time.
 - Contradictory behaviour by certain actors is to be expected given the complexity of the socio-political environment and the multiple spheres of influence in which they operate.
 - Institutions (‘stakeholder’ or ‘partner’) taking part in shared management processes and the people who represent them, often have their own weaknesses which can impact negatively on the process.
- Capitalising and institutionalising the results of collective decision-making is important in linking the ‘Words to the Act’ with certain actors.
- Indicators of ‘progress’ and ‘success’ need to be particularly supple and subtle when analysing process approaches (i.e. behaviour changes; adoption of an idea/approach, mechanisms being used and working etc...).

6.1.5 Management Structures/Organisations

- Given the importance of the wider socio-political environment in which shared management takes place, it is important that ‘outside agencies’ DON’T:-
 - Impose preconceived structures/forms of organisation: Outsiders are very badly placed to understand the subtle power relations that exist between actors and the safe guards that need to be built into the system.
 - Promote either ‘old existing’ or ‘new’ structures: Existing, modified or new institutions are all possible: the actors themselves are best placed to collectively decide which option is most appropriate for the shared management context.
 - Set up a ‘structure’ as the ‘starting point’ of the process: It is important that the definition of the shared management structure/institution is the result of an inclusive, informed and collective reflection and discussion process, not the starting point.

7.0 Conclusion

Shared management of common property resources is a complex issue and remains a major development challenge for the rural population of the Sahel and its partners. The on-going experience at Takiéta has and will continue to be a period of apprenticeship for all actors concerned; communities, technical services,

traditional chiefs, administrative authorities, civil society organizations and the organization SOS Sahel alike. However, the experience has already confirmed the initial hypothesis that diverse stakeholders have the existing capacity to organize themselves and collectively manage their common resources for the future: IF the management environment favors equitable inclusion, subsidiary and dynamic processes of stakeholder negotiation. Where efforts have failed in the past, we would argue that the fault lies not so much with the stakeholders, as with the approach adopted by external agencies there to ‘support’ them, too many of whom continue to treat collaborative or shared management primarily as a simple technical issue without recognizing it for the complex social issue it actually is. We believe that a serious rethink is required about what NRM and sound local governance in the context of decentralization means. From what we have learned it has everything to do with equitable and legitimate representation and the promotion of effective social communication systems.