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THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES: SECURING OUR RIGHTS SENEGAL RIVER BASIN

Success stories



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Senegal
Women arrive at a gathering
under the roof of the cistern
system in the village of
Ndiam Peulh

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SENEGAL RIVER BASIN CASE STUDY

Highlights



In Senegal, Mali and Mauritania, the VGGT have improved tenure rights, providing a tool to establish standards of governance and improve tenure security.



In four countries of the Senegal River Basin, reform processes are now more inclusive as a direct result of multi-stakeholder platforms.



In Mali, the new Agricultural Land Law includes elements in line with VGGT principles, with ten local land commissions now operational in the Kayes region according to new law stipulations, thanks to a local multi-stakeholder platform.



In Senegal, investment projects, assessments as well as local land charters based on VGGT principles have resulted in a dialogue between private sector, local authorities and producer organizations.



A multi-stakeholder policy dialogue has been established in Mali and is the heart of a new land reform process.



Training of Senegalese paralegal experts – which has facilitated land titling to support women and youth and is part of the local platform action plan in Podor – was implemented in January 2018.



A land reform process has been launched in Mauritania resulting in a multi-stakeholder policy dialogue.



At the regional level, the Senegal River Development Organization (*L'Organisation pour la Mise en Valeur du Fleuve Sénégal* – OMVS) has initiated the preparation of a Basin land policy document, with the support of the regional platform.

1. INTRODUCTION

110 million hectares of the Senegal River Basin are pastureland, followed by about 1.2 million hectares of arable land. The Senegal River Basin's pastures comprise one of the world's largest continuous area of common grazing land.

Only 7 percent of the cropland in the Senegal River Basin is irrigated, and 8 percent is forested. The average rate of deforestation in the 2000–2005 time period was 0.5 percent.

INTERESTING FACTS

Agriculture, livestock, water, grassland, forest and health are the most vulnerable sectors.

Between 1990 and 2006, the area of barren land increased three times, while woodland decreased by 25 percent.

Surface water resources are decreasing at an accelerating rate.

The *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* (VGGT) were endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in May 2012.

These Voluntary Guidelines have been described as a catalyst leading to improvements in conditions under which land is held or occupied in agriculture sectors. The VGGT address problems of weak governance of tenure and the growing pressure on natural resources, assisting countries to achieve food security for all.

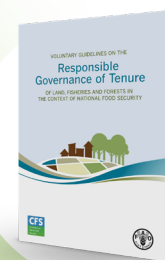
FAO has been working in more than 58 countries providing technical assistance, training and capacity development, as well as support to the assessment, formulation and implementation of relevant national policies and laws.

Between 2014 and 2017, the VGGT were introduced in Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal, through national workshops and learning programmes, funded by France, Germany, Italy, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Flexible Multi-Partner Mechanism (FMM), including funds from Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. The project “An improved governance of tenure for a shared prosperity in the Senegal River Basin”

(SRB), funded by Germany between November 2015 and May 2019, was the backbone of these interventions and the catalyst of the programme approach set up by FAO, IPAR and their partners in the region.

“ The initiative for this project started with the aftermath of the food, financial and energy crisis of 2008 when there was a rush for land in Africa. In this context, the Committee on World Food Security (*Commissariat à la Sécurité Alimentaire* - CFS) launched the preparation of the VGGT, involving civil society, governments and actors in the private sector.”

DR CHEIKH OUMAR BA
Executive Director of IPAR



Rome, 2012
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Paperback

Available in:
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SENEGAL RIVER BASIN

- National capital
- Multi-stakeholder platform
- International boundary
- Provincial boundary

Source:
United Nations World Map 4170 R18.1 Feb20
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289 000 KM²
IN SENEGAL RIVER
BASIN AREA

3 500 000
APPROXIMATE
POPULATION

85%
OF POPULATION
LIVE IN
PROXIMITY
TO THE RIVER

100 000 HA
OF LAND ARE CURRENTLY
BEING DEVELOPED IN
THE BASIN

20 000 HA
IN THE DRY SEASON
(MARCH TO JUNE)

60 000 HA
ARE CULTIVATED IN
THE RAINY SEASON
(JUNE TO SEPTEMBER)

2. CHALLENGES IN THE SENEGAL RIVER BASIN

The Senegal River Basin is shared between four countries: Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal, and is fed by the Senegal River, at 1 800 km long the second longest river in Western Africa. Most of the Basin has a desert sub-Saharan climate. The situation is aggravated by recurrent and extended periods of drought, which were particularly dramatic in the 1970s and 1980s.

About 3.5 million people live in the Basin, 85 percent of whom live near the river. 75 percent of the people live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. At about 3 percent per year, the population growth rate in the basin is above average compared to the individual countries, and youth migration is very high (about 40 percent). The Senegal River Basin is a strategic area for agricultural production and food security, where populations depend largely on access to land, the river and natural resources for ensuring their livelihoods.

The food crisis of 2008 has led to an unprecedented rush of investors on agricultural and pastoral lands, especially in West Africa. With the already noticeable effects of climate change and the reduction (or under-utilization) of agricultural land due to various factors such as urban sprawl or land degradation, threats and increasing pressure on

land resources, sustainability of production systems is increasingly threatened. In addition, access to land has proven difficult for the most vulnerable segments, especially women and young people. The Senegal River Basin does not escape these phenomena, though it is the focus of attention of the concerned governments, the Senegal River Development Organization (*L'Organisation pour la Mise en Valeur du Fleuve Sénégal* – OMVS), but also civil society actors, socio-professional agricultural organizations and technical and financial partners.

In this context of increasing challenges, some of the main obstacles to investing sustainably in agriculture to fight chronic hunger in the Senegal River Basin relate to tenure issues. Some of the more serious obstacles are poorly recognized land rights; lack of transparency of attribution; difficult access for the more vulnerable; weak tenure governance; and failure to determine and enforce community interests in land transactions in the face of powerful players negotiating transactions in a limited group of actors.

“ The Senegal River Basin will constitute an important granary for the four countries. But paradoxically, it is today threatened in many ways: problems are linked to access to land, management of pastoralism, and poverty as well, where a significant percentage of people live on less than USD 2 a day. ”

IBRAHIMA ARONA DIALLO
SRB Project Coordinator

CONFLICTS FOR ACCESS TO NATURAL RESOURCES

Djibi Sall, a pastoralist from Podor, in Northern Senegal, wishes to lead his herd to pastures without fear of reprisals from farmers. In many localities of the Senegal River Valley, conflicts were recurrent between pastoralists and



Village of Ndiama
Peulh, Senegal
Women working in a
vegetable garden

farmers, with a lack of appropriate means of organizing access to land for all parties. For many actors, access to land remains a challenge.

“ Women want to work but do not have access to land. We are seeking the help of authorities to gain this access. When you go into the fields, you see many women working, especially in Podor, but they are not land owners and they are forced to rent. ”

NDEYE FATOU GUEYE
Farmer in Podor region, Senegal

3. THE ROLE OF THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES IN THE SENEGAL RIVER BASIN

MAINSTREAMING THE VGGT PRINCIPLES AT MULTIPLE LEVELS

In the Senegal River Basin, VGGT activities started in 2014 with an inaugural project funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and implemented by *Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale* (IPAR) to raise awareness and disseminate the VGGT in the region, in particular with civil society organizations (CSOs). A first national workshop on tenure governance was organized in Dakar in March 2014, with the support of the IFAD project and from the governments of France and Italy.

Initiated in 2015 by FAO and IPAR, the SRB project aims at representing a local and regional response to the challenges described in Section 2 as well as to an increasing demand from numerous actors of the Senegal River Basin over the past few years – especially representatives from civil society – to discuss and improve governance of tenure and accountability in the context of new investments in agriculture made by public and private investors. The concept was based on studies and experience, collected by FAO, IPAR and other local actors, showing that land tenure is a key constraint in promoting

sustainable development in the Senegal River Basin. To cope with these issues, the recently adopted VGGT and the African Union Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa (F&G) provided references and principles for action, in order to improve the governance of tenure in this strategic region.

The project was primarily conceived to work at three levels and to facilitate knowledge sharing between these three levels:

1 LOCAL LEVEL

With the aim to identify, dialogue and address local tenure issues by triggering participatory and multi-stakeholder processes

2 NATIONAL LEVEL

Reflection on national policies and legal frameworks, prompting and/or contributing to reform processes

3 REGIONAL (BASIN) LEVEL

FAO and IPAR will foster and facilitate the exchange of lessons learned and the cross feeding of debates between the three countries, in collaboration with OMVS

“ The SRB project came to Mauritania at the right time. It allowed us — through the establishment of local platforms and a national platform — to enrich the debate and to open a round table for negotiations and discussions with all the stakeholders regarding land issues. Through all the regional visits, in particular in Matam and Dakar (Senegal), during discussions and workshops, the project allowed stakeholders, including associations, the state and all actors concerned by land issues, to share their experience. Exchanging knowledge with partners and colleagues from neighboring countries is fundamental. ”

MOHAMED YAHYA OULD MOHAMED YAHYA
Ministry of Lands, Housing and the Environment,
Mauritania

INFLUENCING INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND DEVELOPING INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

A decisive way for collective governance to support responsible governance of tenure is through multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs). These platforms bring together government, civil society and the private sector to address complex challenges in securing tenure rights that no one party has the capacity, resources, and know-how to do alone.

National multi-stakeholder platforms were established in Senegal, Mali, Mauritania and Guinea, respectively in March 2014, September 2016, October 2017 and April 2018. Comprising on average between eighty and one hundred participants, they include women and youth from CSOs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, the media, development partners, landowners and traditional leaders.

Integrating the efforts of all stakeholders, the first course of action for multi-stakeholder platforms was to discuss the core principles of the VGGT and see how they were reflected in various national processes. On this basis, the platforms have contributed to the preparation of national road maps,

strategies, policies and the improvement of legal and administrative frameworks. These road maps constitute a crucial contribution to existing reform processes and were also a by-product of triggering and strengthening policy dialogue.

The project has also taken up the challenge of establishing a regional platform on land governance. Before this project, policy dialogue on land tenure was virtually non-existent among the countries of the Senegal River Basin. This issue was essentially considered as a question of with transborder incidents and conflicts as a common occurrence. After a series of missions led by IPAR and FAO in 2016, the first regional workshop

was held from 30 May to 1 June 2016 in Dakar. With 80 participants, this event was the starting point of the regional platform, which initiated the preparation process of a Basin land charter launched by OMVS.

The programme has also promoted and supported the creation of local multi-stakeholder platforms in Mamou (Guinea), Kayes (Mali), Boghé (Mauritania) and Podor (Senegal), each aiming to foster open and transparent dialogue in their respective region to improve governance of tenure. They have also been a forum on design and implementation of innovative approaches (cf. specific focus on local platforms below).



DEVELOPING CAPACITIES OF THE VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS

The FAO VGGT programme has placed an emphasis on developing the capacities of all categories of actors, and in particular of governmental bodies and CSOs. Capacity development was considered as a base, as a grounding mechanism to ensure relevant and active participation in the multi-stakeholder platforms at all levels. The platforms themselves have implemented ambitious capacity development programs for different categories of actors, to test new approaches to land governance and to trigger and/or support reform processes. Therefore, capacity development on VGGT and F&G has been a continuous process throughout the project, with the following milestones:

• CAPACITY BUILDING AT REGIONAL LEVEL FOR POLICY AND DECISION MAKERS

The regional multi-stakeholder platform was the ideal arena for strengthening capacities of the different actors, including parliamentarians and government officials. In order to offer parliamentarians a better understanding of the challenges and concrete actions that need to be taken regarding the national road maps to improve governance of tenure, the training session was embedded in the first regional workshop. Attended by members of parliament from three countries (four from Senegal; five from Mauritania; four from Mali), it allowed these parliamentarians not only to learn about the VGGT and F&G principles and recommendations, but also to compare their vision of land policies and laws with other categories of stakeholders, including government officials and CSOs.

OMVS, FAO and IPAR co-organized a second capacity development

workshop at regional level, specifically designed to improve government officials' understanding of the policy challenges towards improved land governance, in the light of the VGGT. This training enabled the participants to:

- take stock of tenure rights and local tenure practices and learn to contribute, at local level, to the recognition of tenure rights;
- discuss responsible agricultural investments in the Senegal River Basin area within the context of increasing pressure on land and other natural resources;
- target priority themes for future training and capacity development on a larger scale;
- study issues, challenges and initiatives of tenure governance at various levels (regional, national and local);
- brainstorm on inclusive and participatory consultation and dialogue mechanisms;
- contribute to the conceptualization of a regional (SRB) land policy and possibly a land observatory in the Senegal River Basin.

Senegal River Basin

Senegalese fisherman off-load fish from their boats to sell in local markets and export to other countries



• CAPACITIES OF OTHER STAKEHOLDERS, IN PARTICULAR, CSOs STRENGTHENED ON VGGT AND LAND GOVERNANCE TOOLS

A multi-stakeholder regional capacity development workshop on land governance was held on 19 and 20 September 2017 in Matam, Senegal, in partnership with the Senegal River Development Organization (OMVS) and civil society organizations. This workshop constituted a pivotal step, explicitly, to discuss with CSOs the most significant policy commitments that the project created at sub-regional level: the preparation of a land tenure charter (*charte du foncier*) for sustainable land governance in the Basin. It also strengthened CSOs' capacities to use the VGGT and contribute to policy dialogue in the three countries. The trainings enabled the participants to gain a better understanding of:

- Challenges and specificities of land governance and tenure issues at national level and, more broadly, in the Senegal River Basin;
- The principles of the VGGT and various relating concepts, such as Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), etc.;

The experience and use of tools developed by local partners, notably land charters or agreements, Land Commissions (*Commissions Foncières* – COFOs) and the land investment assessment framework developed by National Committee on Rural People Cooperation (*Conseil National de Cooperation des Ruraux* - CNCR) in Senegal with the support of the VGGT programme;

- The capacities of local actors on improving pastoral land governance based on local realities and international standards;
- Assessment of the potential use of the different instruments and methods at local level, including coherent development of the agribusiness sector and family farming.

Based on these results and findings, a series of three training sessions were organized subsequently in each of the three countries throughout 2018, in Mauritania (Boghé), Mali (Kayes) and Senegal (Podor). Targeting the various stakeholders of the three local platforms, these events involved a large audience of local producers and farmers' organizations, women and youth groups, local elected officials, governmental technical services, private companies and active NGOs (around 140 participants in total).



“ Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a collective right that belongs to any member of a community. This means that communities have the right to make decisions through their own freely chosen representatives, and their customary or other institutions, such as local communities and local elected officials. ”

Extract from FPIC support guides, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal

Around 400 actors of the Senegal River Basin (CSOs, Farmers, organisations, governmental bodies, local governments and administrations, etc.) developed their capacities on VGGT and land governance between 2016 and 2019.

Of these 400, around 100 change agents were identified and are now able to actively contribute to tenure improvement by influencing political processes by playing an active role in multi-stakeholder platforms

4. CHANGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS THROUGH THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES IN THE SENEGAL RIVER BASIN

As highlighted by the members of the regional platform during a workshop in April 2019, the major achievements of the project can be summarized as follows:

“ In Mali, we can see the importance of the changes stemming from this project. Before the law on agricultural land, there were many inconsistencies. Customary practices were shelved in favor of legislation which was passed by the assembly, laws which were not respected by the communities. ”

ZOUMANA TRAORE
Kayes, Mali

- The project enabled the establishment and consolidation at regional, national and local levels of participatory dialogue on land tenure.

This achievement regards an issue still considered as extremely sensitive and conflictual in this region. Multi-stakeholder platforms, which exchange information, experiences and views, now constitute a community of practice and a forum for reflection, highly innovative in the SRB area. Specific emphasis was put on the original approach of local platforms set up in Boghé (Mauritania), Kayes (Mali), Mamou (Guinea) and Podor (Senegal). Whether to solve local land issues, prevent conflicts or experiment new legal frameworks and various land governance tools, these platforms—involving all the concerned actors — are completely in line with the recommendations of the VGGT and constitute a promising model; there have even been proposals for replication. A brochure summarizing the experience of the local platforms was prepared and distributed during the workshop.

- Another major achievement of the project has been the generation and sharing of information and knowledge. Information on the VGGT and F&G has been widely disseminated, along with other related materials. The project made it possible to complete the Land Governance Assessment Framework (LGAF) in the region and complement this with innovative modules on pastoralism and fisheries. Together they constitute a basic assessment of the tenure situation. The project has also enriched knowledge on key land tenure issues, such as customary land rights and practices regarding agricultural investments. Owing to related projects, the design and circulation of local land governance tools has prompted noteworthy innovation amongst numerous SRB stakeholders.



- A third major achievement is the contribution of the project to regional, national and local roadmaps, strategies and policies.

The OMVS initiative aims to prepare a land charter in the Basin, an innovation in terms of a cross-border land policy document. Throughout its implementation, the project has also supported initiatives aiming at improving legal land frameworks in the countries involved (see below). These long, complex processes go far beyond the duration and scope of the project, and the momentum and activities which have been created will continue well after the end of the project.

“ We have exceeded the results we imagined at the start of the project. In the countries of the SRB, we did not envision that a multi-stakeholder dialogue could be so beneficial and that there could be structures working collaboratively on land with prospects for the future, all of which came together seamlessly over the past three years. ”

ANN-KRISTIN ROTHE
Project coordinator, FAO



2019 CONFERENCE ON
LAND POLICY IN AFRICA

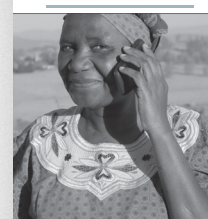
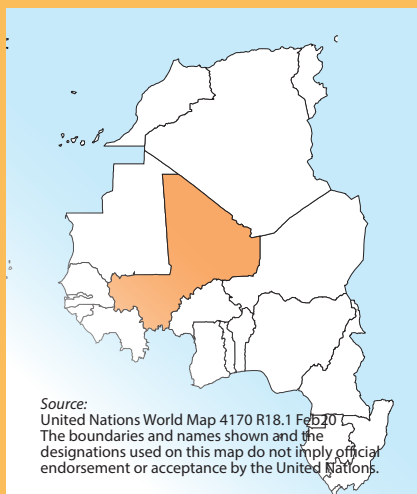


Illustration de stratégies de sécurisation des droits fonciers des femmes dans un contexte d'acquisition des terres à grande échelle au Sénégal

Ndéye Yandé NDIAYE
Doctorante Chercheuse UGB, Sénégal/Centre de Recherche NELGA francophone
Chercheuse à l'Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale (IPAR)

CHANGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN MALI



“ One of the major accomplishments of this project, in terms of securing land, was the creation of village land commissions (*Commissions foncières villageoises - COFO*) in the Kayes region. The local platform made it possible to set up commissions which help manage land issues. These commissions are a tool, a precious instrument for the local populations in the management of land. ”

SALIF OUMAROU

Member of local MSP, Kayes, Mali

The foundation for a national platform was created in 2015 by CSOs in Mali, thanks to the IFAD project implemented by IPAR. Following the demand in both civil society and the government, starting from September 2016, the SRB project began to help attract governmental actors to create a bona fide multi-stakeholder mechanism. Thereafter, the Platform played a key role in supporting the various actors for land governance road map development. The members successfully promoted a multi-actor dialogue around the preparation and adoption of the new Agricultural Land Law (*Loi sur le Foncier Agricole - LFA*), passed in April 2017, which was influenced by the VGGT. For example, Article 13 of the law requires the involvement of state and local authorities to ensure equitable access to agricultural land for small-scale and commercial farmers. Beyond this, it stipulates that at least 15 percent of developed land (both in irrigated schemes and rain-fed agriculture) is allocated to women and youth organizations situated in the concerned area. It defines Village Land Commissions, involving citizens, and the National Agricultural Land Observatory (*Observatoire national du Foncier Agricole*) as the entities responsible for the management of agricultural land. The platform took part in the preparation of the application decrees in April 2018 and coordinated the first operations aiming at its practical implementation in Kayes region, ensuring a close collaboration with the local platform set up in this region. The LFA constitutes a major shift in recognition of rural

communities' ownership of agricultural land through ownership certificates, legitimate customary tenure rights (individual and collective), rules and practices, and customary detention or possession of agricultural land that is not registered through the procedure of non-contested twenty-year long exploitation. Based on this success, the platform is now closely involved in the reform process concerning the general land law recently initiated.

At the local level, in the Kayes region, the SRB project facilitated the establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform on responsible land governance, chaired by the governor of the region and involving actors concerned with agricultural and rural land tenure. In October 2018, a training course was organized focused on strengthening capacities of local actors on the LFA, the related decrees and other relevant legal frameworks, which helped the various stakeholders to gain knowledge and skills to effectively enforce their rights. Through a radio broadcast most of the rural population was informed about the role, responsibilities and procedures of the Village Land Commissions (COFO).

As part of the collective action plan of this platform, ten Village Land Commissions were established in Kayes region as a contribution to the implementation of the LFA. The main objective of these Commissions is to prevent tenure conflicts at village level to strengthen social cohesion and food security. The establishment has inspired several other development actors to plan the establishment of similar commissions in other regions.

HUMAN INTEREST STORY

In Mali, ten village commissions on tenure (*Commissions foncières villageoises* – COFO) have been set up in the Kayes region, in order to enable the implementation of the new Agricultural Land Law. They significantly contributed to the implementation of this law in the region by preventing and helping to manage land tenure conflicts at the local level, while strengthening social cohesion. The establishment of these COFOs also fostered awareness raising of various stakeholders in the local community affected by this initiative. In particular, it allowed women and young people participate in the land tenure management of their village, and to defend their respective interests *vis-à-vis* the decision-making authorities.

According to Ms Mariam Sissoko, a local female leader and active member of the Kayes platform: “these village commissions on tenure will enable women to claim their rights and will facilitate their participation in decision-making.” The entire interview with Ms Sissoko has been published in the video “*Bassin du fleuve Sénégal, FAO-IPAR – Pour un accès inclusive au foncier*” available upon request from IPAR. The various users of the agricultural land, including farmers, pastoralists, fishermen and foresters, are legally represented within the COFOs and will be able to work in synergy for the common good.

The results obtained through this approach were extremely positive and led to the creation of other commissions in the region, in particular a number of local forestry commissions under the aegis of the Regional Direction for Agriculture. This demonstrates the important role these commissions have in achieving responsible land tenure governance in Mali.

“ The agricultural land law has led to the creation of village commissions for local land management. It is important that young people and women participate in these commissions. I represent women at the municipal and village levels, and as women we can influence legislation and encourage future involvement in the decision-making process. ”

MARIAMA CISSOKO
Representative of women associations,
Kayes, Mali

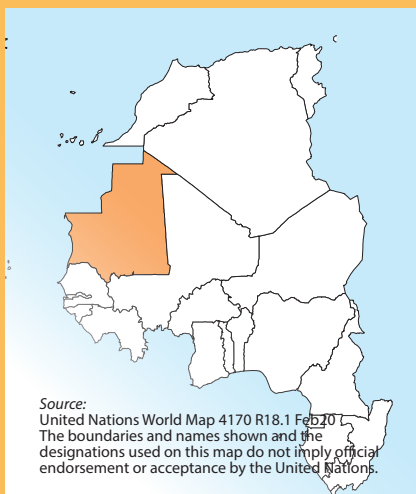


Kayes, Mali
Inaugural meeting of
the multi-stakeholder
platform



©FAO/Sonia Nguyen

CHANGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN MAURITANIA



As in Mali, in Mauritania the IFAD-IPAR project launched the first basic trainings courses on VGGT for CSOs in 2015. However, this did not immediately lead to the creation of a national platform. Several political and cabinet changes slowed down the process, a process which was put back on track by emphasizing capacity development of various stakeholders. Gradually, a viable platform emerged, and finally, thanks to the initiation of an unprecedented dialogue between various actors, the possibility of a land reform process emerged by mid-2016, fostered by a group of partners including the World Bank and the European Union. FAO played a key role in promoting this idea and from March to June 2016, the SRB project team participated in two research missions regarding the need to improve land governance in Mauritania and the participation in a land reform process. It also led the identification of areas of technical assistance to support the process. This gave the project team the opportunity to propose the organization of a national VGGT platform in Mauritania, successfully raising more interest than previous attempts.

Finally, the national platform was officially set up during the first national workshop held in October 2017 and put under the aegis of the National Land Reform Commission (*Commission Technique pour la Réforme Foncière - COTREF*). The government recognized the role that this multi-stakeholder mechanism could play in the reform process and officially declared that it would be the

arena for discussing various options and orientations. This dialogue on such a sensitive issue was an unprecedented event in Mauritania. Traditionally, tenure governance has been considered and treated as a state affair, without genuine participation of civil society and local communities. The lack of inclusive dialogue with communities was often at the origin of violent social conflicts, and contributed to the failure of major public and private hydro-agricultural development initiatives. For the first time, participants created a “safe place” for dialogue, to help recognize the legitimate land rights of the most vulnerable (in particular women and youth) and equitable access to natural resources. It brought together administrative structures with socio-professional organizations, civil society and local communities to jointly improve land governance. This was a key achievement of the project, which then triggered policy-making processes that were more sensitive to the people and to their concerns.

This dynamic, inclusive and participatory dialogue was also opened at local level, in Boghé, with the creation of a local multi-stakeholder platform. Administrative structures, young people and women organizations, fishermen, pastoralists and private sector all took part in this new approach. The platform’s action plan operationalized the VGGT at local level and strengthened capacities of these different groups of actors to learn and apply national and international legal frameworks related to their rights. This experience has

also: (i) helped create an inclusive and factual debate about land governance; and (ii) led to the recognition of the fundamental role that women and youth play in the fight against food and nutrition insecurity and the need to create decent jobs for rural youth.

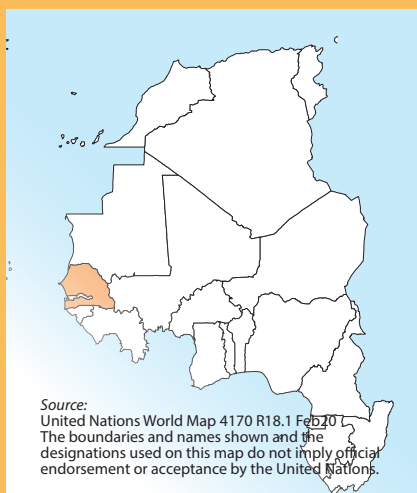
This new positive and inclusive environment, created around the idea of responsible governance of tenure in this region, has not only allowed young people and women to better defend their legitimate rights, but has also largely contributed to establishing trust and mutual respect among all actors, particularly between citizens and administrations, which were previously opposed to all kind of inclusive debates on land. Given the very positive results of this experience, the national platform and the COTREF recommended to replicate the Boghé platform model at country level in Mauritania.

**Sédhiou,
Senegal River Basin**

Fisher folk from
the Agriculture
Community Domain
(*Domaine Agricole
Communautaire – DAC*)
celebrate World Food
Day at a fish farm.



CHANGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN SENEGAL



“ The arrival of IPAR, supported by FAO, in the department of Podor where there is a rush towards land, constitutes a blessing for us. With the establishment of the platform, the support and supervision of IPAR and FAO, we have a framework for consultation where all 22 mayors and the departmental council met. In addition, we have the technical services of the State, but also include the producers in the platform: farmers, pastoralists, fishermen. We have women and women’s groups that are represented. We have civil society, but we also have the press and other communication bodies to tell the story of what has been done on this platform. ”

MAMADOU MBARE HANNE

Coordinator of the local MSP, Podor, Senegal

Historically, the VGGT platform of Senegal is the oldest MSP in the region. Created during the first national workshop held in March 2014 and supported by FAO, IFAD, ILC (International Land Coalition), France and Italy, it has become a pivotal entity when discussing governance of tenure in Senegal. Thanks to a pro-active steering committee (*Comite de pilotage de la plateforme-COPIL*), the platform has been intervening in three main categories of actions since 2014: awareness raising and capacity development of various actors; contribution to the reflection on the land reform process; and operationalization of the VGGT at local level. It is also noteworthy that the work of the platform and related COPIL were closely followed and supported by a local Donor Working Group on Land, chaired by FAO, which was created in March 2016. It contributed to the mapping of donors’ land tenure activities in Senegal and to coherence among the various initiatives. As a whole, the platform organized four national workshops.

In order to launch a land reform process in 2012, the President of Senegal created a special Commission (*Commission Nationale de Réforme Foncière-CNRF*) in charge of preparing a national land policy document. In 2014, the national VGGT platform was associated with the process, with the aim of mainstreaming the VGGT into the process and ensuring a participatory and transparent approach, closely involving civil society. The national workshops supported by FAO, some

of them co-chaired by the president of the CNRF, played an important role in offering a space for debate between the various actors about the draft policy document. It was the case in December 2016, when coherence with the VGGT of the land policy document’s vision, approach and objectives was confirmed by the third national workshop. A good practice document on “multi-actor dialogue: the VGGT at the heart of Senegal’s tenure reform” was prepared by FAO, disseminated among partners and presented during the 43rd Session of the CFS.

Finally, the CNRF submitted the final draft version of the land policy document to the President of the Republic during the 1st quarter of 2017. This important document refers to the VGGT and includes a number of stipulations in line and/or inspired by the guidelines. Following the implementation of its mission, the President dissolved the CNRF. Since then, no other significant progress has been made with regard to new steps in the land reform, as Senegal entered an electoral period. This is a major concern for the various stakeholders involved in the process, in particular concerning future approaches to participation, should the reform process resume. In April 2019, just before project closure, a World Bank mission took place in Senegal, with the aim to relaunch a reform process and develop a USD 50 million project proposal to set up a rural cadaster, anchored in Senegal’s national development strategy (*Plan Sénégal Emergent*). This new perspective may significantly influence

Touba, Senegal

A woman drinking water in the village of Douly

national strategies to change tenure governance. One of the last tasks of the project team was to collaborate with the World Bank and develop a position paper with detailed comments on the project proposal, in order to ensure that the key aspects previously included in the land policy document and the VGGT principles would be taken into consideration.

The national platform also addressed other tenure sectors: it contributed to the preparation of a new law on inland fisheries and included the forestry sector in its strategy to improve legal and administrative frameworks. An in-depth assessment of the forestry normative and policy frameworks was conducted and inspired local action to strengthen forestry tenure governance with civil society partners.

The national platform in Senegal also developed a series of interventions at local level to operationalize the VGGT. An assessment tool framed by the VGGT enabled local actors to check whether agriculture investment initiatives were compliant with international standards and local rights. Codes of Conduct for Sustainable Management of Natural Resources were set-up, local land governance charters were established and titles issued for vulnerable groups, in particular women and youth. The platform's core members also conducted studies on the feasibility of a national land tenure observatory and the links between tenure and access to credit, to inform the tenure reform process at national level.

The local platform set up in Podor is a first experience of local multi-

stakeholder dialogue on land on the Senegalese side of the River Basin. It enjoys great legitimacy and operational strength, thanks to its composition of stakeholders from local governments, administrative authorities, decentralized technical services, farmers' organizations, women and youth associations, the private sector and financial partners. The implementation of the platform's action plan provided a deeper analysis of land issues, including agro-industrial developments, environmental issues, land degradation, land negotiation and conflict resolution. It brought these issues to the attention and consideration of national policy debates and decision-making bodies through the national platform. The platform grew in its strategic role and capacities to prevent tenure related conflicts. The consultation framework of the mayors and local governments was mandated by the members of the platform to play the role of facilitating conflict prevention. This consultation framework can now identify the conflicts at their early stage in order to resolve them rapidly and avoid escalation. In Senegal's broader reform context, the platform in Podor, has become a strategic partner to implement the decentralization policy. Considering the key role that family farms play regarding food security and youth employment, strengthening their rights and implementing decentralization towards communities, makes a crucial difference in the development of the Senegal River Basin.

FOCUS ON LOCAL PLATFORMS: ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

Local platforms in Mali, Mauritania, Guinea and Senegal have already produced a number of positive impacts on land governance issues in the areas concerned. The first is the creation of open and transparent space for dialogue, where conflicts and disagreements often threaten to take over. Beyond this, other tangible results can be highlighted, such as strengthening the capacities of local actors, legitimizing and strengthening local governance institutions, creating and sharing knowledge, contributing to improving and practically implementing legal frameworks. The following paragraphs will focus on detailing the results achieved to date.

“ The project has enabled us to create a multi-actor dialogue, a forum for debates, meetings, exchanges, where young people are involved, as are women, to include all categories of actors. ”

DR CHEIKH OUMAR BA
Executive Director of IPAR

• OPEN AND TRANSPARENT MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE

The four multi-stakeholder platforms of Boghé, Kayes, Mamou and Podor have enabled the establishment of a peaceful, open and inclusive dialogue around troublesome land issues encountered in the SRB. In Senegal, the Podor platform has benefited from the existence of a structure called the Framework for consultation of local authorities in Podor (*Cadre de concertation des collectivités territoriales de Podor*), which brings together 22 municipalities and the departmental council, i.e. 23 communities of the eponymous department. This framework aims at pooling development actions, with the land issue already being a major theme before the creation of the platform. The establishment of this safe space for dialogue dedicated specifically to land, the introduction of the VGGT in the debate, the reference to the experiences of the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) and of the project Irrigated Agriculture and Economic Development of Podor Rural Areas (*Projet Agriculture Irriguée et Développement Economique des territoires ruraux de Podor - AIDEP*), currently being implemented in ten communes (former rural communities), have greatly contributed to the search for concrete solutions to land problems in the central part of the valley. After having enhanced the establishment of a mapping of the programs and actors

intervening on the land in the area, it was possible to federate the local administrations, the administrative authorities, the decentralized technical services, the peasant organizations, the associations of women and young people, the private sector and some technical and financial partners around the following themes:

- inter-communality in land matters;
- negotiations, prevention and management of land disputes;
- the institutionalization of local land governance tools;
- land tenure security for women and youth;
- sharing of experiences and tools between actors;
- revitalizing consultation frameworks / inter-community groupings;
- strengthening of land institutions and tools;
- support for the resolution of land conflict cases;
- sharing on the issue of administrative boundaries;
- design and implementation of a communication strategy and plan to support and enhance the activities of the platform and the dissemination of the VGGT at local level.

In Boghé, Mauritania, the baseline situation in terms of governance of land tenure was characterized by: (i) unilateral and often improvised decisions by state structures, (ii) the absence of dialogue and concerted action between the various actors, (iii) the exclusion of the most vulnerable

groups, in particular women and young people, and (iv) the lack of communication and transparency. To improve this situation, the Boghé platform has managed to create a space for participatory and inclusive dialogue. On this platform, for the first time in the country, the various actors intervening in the field of land governance are represented, including administrative authorities, decentralized technical services, women's and youth organizations, local elected officials, agro-pastoralists, fishermen, socio-professional organizations, the private sector and some technical and financial partners.

This new environment, favourable to inclusive and peaceful dialogue, has enabled communities and different groups to freely express their expectations and contribute to decision-making in local land governance. This created a harmonized vision around the following main themes: (i) access of women and young people to land ownership, (ii) community involvement in the decision-making process linked to land issues (iii) the need for transparency in terms of land, (iv) the valuation of available natural resources (fisheries, forests and land), (v) the need to take into account the principles of the VGGT in the ongoing process of land reform.

In the Kayes region, in Mali, the establishment of the local multi-stakeholder platform on responsible land governance supported by the SRB project, like the platform existing at the national level, plays a crucial role in the

effective implementation of the Law on Agricultural Land (LFA). This local platform is chaired by the governor of the region, with the involvement of all actors intervening in the field of land, including decentralized technical services (agriculture, livestock, fisheries, environment), farmers' organizations, local elected representatives, NGOs, civil society, women's and youth organizations, etc. This multi-stakeholder approach has fostered permanent dialogue between the various actors, both state and non-state, and has become a privileged space for exchange and essential consultation on land governance at regional level.

This platform has fostered a synergy of actions among the different actors who are often opposed on this key theme of land, but it also facilitated the integration of actors sometimes forgotten or excluded from the process. The platform also enabled the establishment and capacity building of a dozen COFOs in the Kayes region. As defined by law, these COFOs represent the materialization of the communities' consideration in the land management of their localities. Their main role is to prevent and manage land conflicts in order to strengthen the food security of the population and secure customary lands in villages and families.

In Mamou, Guinea, the establishment of the local MSP has not only enabled the development of an unprecedented dialogue on tenure issues, but it has also led to a better understanding and documentation of the local practices of tenure governance.

“ We, in the livestock sector, find ourselves in this platform insofar as our pastoralist leaders are represented in the platform and defend the interest of producers; we are there whenever there is a need to defend, we represent and therefore manage the interests of these pastoralists who are in the diéris* areas. ”

YORO DIAW

Pastoralist in the Podor Region

* diéris: geographical term of Toucouleur origin, which indicates the non-floodable lands of the valley of a river, as opposed to Walo (or Wallo), the cultivated lands in the part flooded by the annual floods of the river. These areas of dry crops are generally more threatened because they are entirely dependent on rainfall, which is why we also speak of “rain crops”. Far from the river, never flooded, they are nonetheless favorable for animal husbandry and market gardening. The Senegalese *diéri* is probably the best known. It is located along the Senegal River, approximately between Dagana and Matam, to the south, towards Ferlo. But we also find this form of landscape in other Sahelian regions, such as Mauritania.

• KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND SHARING

One of the advantages of creating a space for permanent dialogue between the various actors is to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, experiences and good practices, also useful in facilitating exchanges at national level and between countries. As part of the VGGT program, the various stakeholders (CSOs, parliamentarians, representatives of local communities, etc.) from four countries participated in training on:

- content, objectives and experiences of implementing the Guidelines;
- approaches to land negotiations;
- land registration procedures;
- customary land rights in the region;
- impacts of agribusiness on family farming;
- feasibility of a regional observatory on land governance;
- tools developed by some members of national platforms and with the support of the program. Among these tools, we can cite the aforementioned contextualized guide on the principle of FPIC, an analysis grid of investment projects with land impact (CNCR, Senegal) or the codes of good conduct in land governance (ActionAid, Senegal);
- Mali Land Law and its implementing decrees;
- governance of pastoral lands;
- land management decentralization;
- territorialization of public policies.

• LEGITIMIZATION AND STRENGTHENING OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS

Because they operate based on an open and peaceful debate, local platforms made it possible to clarify rules for land management at different levels: village and hamlet levels, municipal and inter-municipal levels. The Kayes platform in Mali facilitated the establishment of a dialogue between state and non-state actors with the main objective of testing the provisions of the new law on agricultural land, in which certain provisions are directly inspired by the VGGT, such as the recognition of customary rights or concrete measures for safer access to land for women and youth. With the creation of the ten multi-stakeholder land commissions (COFOs) at different scales, this original approach made it possible to prevent and manage land conflicts at the village level, and ultimately contribute to strengthening social cohesion with the ultimate objective to contribute to better food security.

In Mauritania, the establishment of a local multi-stakeholder platform in Boghé inspired new ways of managing land information in the country. Exchanges between actors are broadened and consolidated at the local level by the designation of municipal focal points, used as an active and dynamic channel for the sharing of information on responsible land governance. The opening of

this new inclusive space for peaceful dialogue broadened the scope of land governance to seek consensual agreements on access to natural resources and their equitable use. Using the VGGT as a guide, forums were created for dialogue, making it possible for stakeholders to get to know and appreciate one another better, with the often-avoided relations between the state and civil society having improved significantly.

In Senegal, the local Podor platform has become a multi-stakeholder reference framework on land governance with the involvement of all 22 local authorities in the Department of Podor and deconcentrated structures and leaders of civil society organizations in the middle valley. Thanks to the Podor local platform, the project has already recorded the establishment of ten state commissions extended to grassroots organizations, and inspired operations of land regularization for the benefit of groups of young people and women. The legitimacy thus acquired made it possible to involve all the land projects in the area and discussions are already underway with a view to setting up a permanent system for the prevention and management of land conflicts at the departmental level in Podor.

“ The programme in Guinea opened up the dialogue on land issues, an extremely important and very sensitive topic considering the country’s past, where the State had a virtual monopoly on land; there has been no debate until now. Contrast that with today, thanks to the VGGT, we can now approach these sensitive questions from a grassroots level, from the participation of civil society amongst other. ”

MOUSTAPHA DIOP

Consultant and research professor at the University of Sonfonia , Guinea. Author of a report on rural land issues in Guinea

• **CONTRIBUTION TO THE IMPROVEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS**

Considering the regularity of multi-actor exchanges based on scientific evidence, favored by the program between the local and national level, local land platforms have played an important role, not only in the implementation of legal frameworks, in particular new ones, but also in the reflections conducted at the national level to amend or reform the laws. More generally, we can consider the platforms as laboratories of land governance, where it is possible to test original or innovative solutions to very concrete problems. In this sense, platforms play a valued role in informing national political debates and processes aimed at improving all aspects of land governance.

In Mauritania, the VGGT played a key role in launching the reform process and preparing a road map to conduct it. The experience of multi-stakeholder dialogue conducted by the Boghé platform has already been selected as a pilot experience by the technical commission on land reform (*Commission nationale technique pour une nouvelle réforme foncière – COTREF*).

In Mali, with the support of the SRB project, the National Coordination of Farmer Organizations (CNOP) and the national multi-stakeholder platform on land governance have greatly contributed to the dissemination of the VGGT to promote their inclusion in the Law on Agricultural Land (*Loi sur le Foncier Agricole – LFA*).

Altansumber, Senegal River Basin
Rice farmers sowing rice paddies



THE SENEGAL RIVER BASIN PROGRAMME

AN INNOVATIVE NETWORK INVOLVING
SEVERAL HUNDRED ACTORS

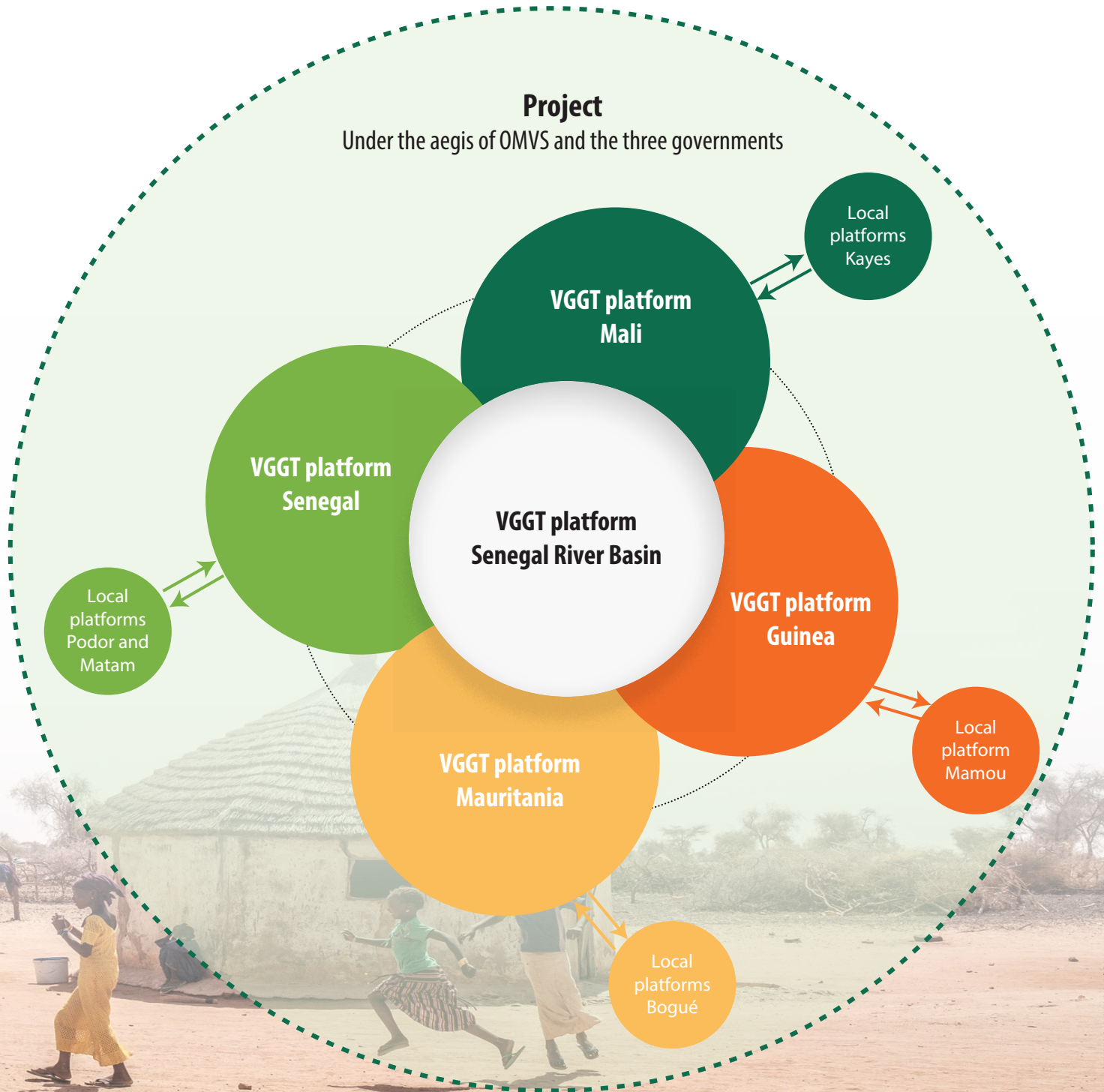


Senegal

Local family on their way
to a cistern in the village of
Ndiama Peulh

Project

Under the aegis of OMVS and the three governments



5. LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS



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1 As explained in the previous sections, one of the project's main achievements is the preparation and implementation of roadmaps to undertake and develop reforms of land policies and laws. Some of these processes (such as the adoption of the Agricultural Land Law in Mali) have been completed. Others, such as the land reform process in Mauritania or in Senegal, will continue far beyond the end of the project. However, the construction of the multi-stakeholder platforms, endorsed by the majority of stakeholders, with a recognized role of group collaboration and open dialogue on land issues, is a guarantee that VGGT principles will continue to be mainstreamed into various processes. Sustainability is also expected to be reached through increased capacities of the different actors and institutions, some of whom become "change agents" able to promote good practices and principles on a long term basis.

These key achievements should be consolidated through:

- continuation of knowledge production and experience sharing; documentation and dissemination of good practices; translation of educational tools into local languages;
- strengthening alliances between local platforms through exchange visits;
- replication of the experience of the local platforms. In Mali and in Mauritania, in particular, there is a clear willingness to use this concept in order to address new issues in other regions;
- fundraising: the platforms require a minimum of financial support to function (organization of meetings and trainings).

2 FAO's VGGT programme has supported various partners in addressing a wide range of land governance situations, such as pastoral land and rights, forest tenure and women's access to land. The project has put special emphasis on developing capacities of women's groups and empowering their members in a region where customary traditions towards women and other vulnerable groups in marginalized positions are often excluded from the decision-making process in relation to land access and agricultural investment. Much more still needs to be done, in particular exploring alternative means of improved tenure not only for women, but also for youth groups who often experience similar difficulties.

The following topics are considered by the platforms as suitable for future discussion:

- the mining industry and related issues, such as evictions (e.g. in Guinea, Senegal);
- pastoral land tenure;
- improved support for formalization of local communities' land rights;
- prevention and resolution of land conflicts (given the general degraded security context in West Africa);
- innovative approaches to tackle rural women's and youth's land issues.

3 Partnership building was a key aspect of the SRB project, which has enjoyed the support of a significant number of partners. IPAR has been the main implementing partner and drafted the initial concept note while leading discussions with the donor. Another of the project's strengths was its ability to stimulate collaboration within FAO and outside of the agency with other institutions and donors. The project also helped to leverage financial and human resources, with a full-programme approach to implement the project's activities.

Development of new partnerships will further enable the improvement of land governance by:

- extending the partnership with other similar initiatives in the area; the development of a Sahel approach is considered appropriate in the face of more recent challenges in West Africa;
- strengthening partnerships between platforms (national and local) and supporting a network of mayors through mutual exchange visits;
- creating new synergies with technical and financial partners and other ongoing projects.
- consolidating the partnership with OMVS and developing new initiatives at regional level (Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel [*Comité Inter-Etate pour la Lutte contre la Sécheresse au Sahel - CILSS*], Sahel Alliance, etc.).

“ The platform, with the support of IPAR, made it possible to increase the knowledge of local mayors, to apply concepts and prepare for conflict management. But above all we hope to prevent conflicts. ”

MAMADOU MBARE HANNE

Coordinator of local MSP, Podor, Senegal

THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES: SECURING OUR RIGHTS SENEGAL RIVER BASIN

“ At the regional level, we are working with OMVS to set up a land charter for land governance. It is local experience and local tools which have enriched the debate at national and regional levels. I think that the adoption of this charter alongside the Senegal River will help reverse trends and finally achieve food security in the Senegal River Basin: this is the ultimate objective of the project. ”

IBRAHIMA ARONA DIALLO
SRB Project Coordinator

Success stories

Cover photographs: first plan photo
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Working for  #ZeroHunger