



Together we can!

Building coalitions in Inner Niger Delta for more effective integrated risk management

Location:
Inner Niger Delta

Partners:
Local coalitions

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Mali Fulani woman Selling milk in the Sourou basin.
Photo credits: Mopti Tourism Regional Direction

Mama Djénépo, Mopti IRM Coalition president
Photo credits: Mr Diallo, Cameramen, Mali

The Inner Niger Delta in Mali is a great green oasis on the edge of the Sahara Desert. It is the second largest wetland in Africa and supports the livelihoods of 2 million people. Yet the valuable natural resources it provides are under threat due to overexploitation, environmental degradation, and unsustainable fishing practices, in turn threatening the life and culture of the people depending on the Delta.

The Inner Niger Delta supports three main livelihood groups: fisher folk, farmers and pastoralists. Historically these groups have lived together peacefully but as resources become more scarce conflict arises. In addition to this, the construction and management of upstream water infrastructure for hydropower and irrigation, such as the Sélingué and Fomi dams, pose a major threat because of the effects on the reduced amount of water and reduced peak flows downstream.

The situation in the Inner Niger Delta may lead to increased levels of poverty, leaving people exposed to shocks and stresses, with women, children and the elderly being most vulnerable. This in turn is impacting on conflict and migration. Mali wants to increase its food production, and new infrastructure can help meet these needs. However, when dams and irrigation projects are poorly designed and managed, they can also threaten livelihoods and undermine food production. Mainstream agriculture has been based on green revolution ideas of the 1960s, with a focus on land clearing and monocultures. Stimulating more holistic agricultural systems, based on tradition, can lead to more sustainable and climate smart food production.

The Inner Niger Delta is a life line for Mali, producing 30% of Mali's rice, 80% of its fish and 60% of its cattle. However, over the past few years yields and production have dropped because of overexploitation of the delta, environmental degradation and unsustainable fishing practices.



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Mopti Regional IRM Coalition Committee members
 Photo credits: Fofana Ibrahima, Wetlands International

The fisher folk, farmers and pastoralists have one thing in common; they all rely on the resources of the Inner Niger Delta and therefore they have a common interest in protecting it. That's why they have organised themselves into local civil society organisations.

'With the new coalition, we have united with crop producers and pastoralists and we have learned different ways to engage with our village leaders and higher authorities. They really take us seriously now.'

*Mama Djénépo,
 Mopti IRM
 Coalition
 president*

Since 2016, Partners for Resilience Mali has facilitated a process of reorganising existing user groups into coalitions at different administrative levels from village and municipality to provincial level. Initially, PfR brought together different types of fisherfolk (sedentary and migrant fishers who did not know each other) and different farmers in 'unions'. In a later stage, PfR supported these unions to form coalitions in which, for the very first time, fishers, farmers, pastoralists and women's groups, work together towards a shared vision – focusing on land rights, overfishing and on being better prepared to respond to flooding. After two years 20,000 people are now organised in 12 coalitions at municipality (commune) level and 3 coalitions at district level (Bankass, Djenné and Mopti). In addition, there is one provincial coalition for the entire Mopti province.

PfR provided trainings to explain the importance of collaboration between different interest groups to face the joint problems of floods, droughts and the increasing conflicts around land and water and what people themselves can do about it when they work together and approach authorities as one voice. Laws on fishing and land rights have been translated in local languages. This has improved people's knowledge of these laws and helped the coalitions to advocate for better application of these laws by technical government agencies, local government officials and elected local representatives.





“We discussed this in the coalition, and we eventually agreed to clean the lakes from these branches and dirt and as a result since 2018 we have improved our relations with the farmers”.

*Mama Djénépo,
Mopti IRM
Coalition president*

“For many years, I have been a member of a fisherfolk cooperative. With the new coalition, we have united with crop producers and pastoralists and we have learned different ways to engage with our village leaders and higher authorities. They really take us seriously now. It has been beneficial to work together with farmers, as we now understand that fisheries combined with rice farming, can be very profitable”, Mama Djénépo, Mopti IRM Coalition president, said. He added: “The PfR programme even invited us to go to Togo, where we learned about an early alert system for flooding which helps to build resilience. Sharing timely information helps people to prepare for and survive floods and droughts better.”

One example of the positive outcomes of the formation of these coalitions is the agreement by fishermen on the Djénne river to change a traditional practice which was having a negative impact on the environment. For years, fishermen have laid branches in the riverbed so that fish breed there and catching them becomes easier and more bountiful. A negative side effect is that all the rubbish that flows in the river collects in the branches, along with deposits of sand. As a result, the height of the river bed increases, so that over the winter months towards the end of February, the river, which is relied on by villagers living close to its banks, dries up. This practice has in fact been banned by the Fisheries Act for more than 20 years, but nobody respected this convention. The communal coalitions in three communes in the district of Djenné, came together to discuss this problem with all actors concerned, and decided to reinforce the ban of laying branches in the river.

Today, you won’t see any fishermen laying branches in the riverbed in Djenné. The fishermen now remove the branches after they have finished fishing, and as a result the quality of the water in the river has begun to improve and it is hoped the river bed will become deeper in the years to come benefitting everyone in the long-term. Since 2018 it can gradually be observed that there is water in the lake for a longer period. Working together is bearing fruits, and motivates people to continue working in these coalitions.

