

# Women in search of citizenship

Experiences from West Africa

Ayesha Imam and Evelien Kamminga



KIT Publishers

## Colophon

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### **Publication and distribution by KIT Publishers**

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Email: [publishers@kit.nl](mailto:publishers@kit.nl)

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<i>Cover photos</i>	Debbie Gray
<i>Layout</i>	Grafisch Ontwerpbureau Agaatz, Meppel, The Netherlands
<i>Production</i>	High Trade BV, Zwolle, The Netherlands

### **Citation**

Imam, A. and E. Kamminga (2012), *Women in search of citizenship. Experiences from West Africa*. Oxfam Novib/ KIT - Royal Tropical Institute 2012

### **Keywords**

Gender equality, women's rights, citizenship, rights-based approach to development, action-research, women's access to justice, women's political participation, women's land rights, West Africa

ISBN 978 94 6022 1927

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# Foreword

This book follows a number of traditions set by the publications of the Gender Equity team at KIT, traditions that have evolved over a decade of practice and theorizing on gender in the development process.

In keeping with the adage that there is nothing so practical as a good theory our work and our publications aim to be both empirically sound and theoretically embedded. Even though development workers claim their relevance on grounds of 'knowing the situation on the ground' and being practical, in reality all our actions are animated by world views and theories of how things work in society. This book is informed by contemporary critical theories on citizenship and rights while at the same time it investigates these concepts from the perspective of women's lived experience in Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

A tradition followed in our work and publications is that we have consistently tried to show the difference between 'doing gender' (by applying check lists, tools, model strategies) and using the social relations of gender as an analytical tool to identify the inequalities in society and to build strategies that promote greater equality. This book is about initiatives by women to claim citizenship and rights in their family, community and in the state. It is about women recognizing for themselves the structures of inequality and working within specific contexts to change their position.

Most of our publications are based on action research, on research processes that are better suited to informing policy and practice and in generating social action. Action research is an integral part of a process of empowerment and when participants in the research process are members of subaltern groups it entails growing into a sense of self-worth and identity as a person that society has denied them. Thus for a woman/ girl/ female subject of social relations personhood would imply a shift away from being recognised and recognising oneself only as daughter, sister, wife, mother, mistress and/or prostitute to being recognised and recognising oneself as a person worthy of rights in and for herself and not merely because she is somebody's daughter, mother and wife. Investing in the personhood of women and girls requires initiatives that help change the 'meaning' of the social identity of women for the women themselves and others in relation to them. It requires initiatives which both provide ideological resources (i.e. a vision of other ways of being) and material resources (real alternatives that make it possible to embrace other ways of being without fear of censure and social ostracism). This book recounts stories of personhood emerging through participation in research processes in which women are active subjects of the research and not merely the objects of somebody else's study.

The tendency in development policy and practice to homogenise the diverse life situations of vastly different social groups by fitting them into categories serves only to empower

development agents rather than the very people whom they purport to serve. This happens most often in gender and development practice although feminist theorists have always reminded us about diversity and of the danger of universalisms. Gender in development practice has relied on several stereotypical constructs of womanhood and indeed of man-woman relationships. These stereotypes and universalisms are about third world women/ poor African women that development agents claim represents the 'authentic' thing. By being in a position to interpret the 'truth' about women's situation or about gender relations development agents then claim the power to represent it and to seek remedies. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy the 'poor' woman remains powerless, voiceless and an eternal victim. In this book we have scrupulously avoided universalisms that homogenise and define populations on terms controlled by powerful agents. These include the tendency to label the countries of West Africa Francophone because they use French as one of the languages of communication, a heritage from the colonial past. By labeling the countries in the action research programme as Francophone a false commonality deriving from the colonial past is imposed on the different systems, institutions and social groups. Remedies offered therefore respond to these constructs and not to the diverse problems faced by the communities and states in these countries.

I would like to thank my colleagues Ayesha Imam and Evelien Kamminga not only for making this publication a reality but also for the consistent, thoughtful and hard work over almost four years that went into making the action research programme a learning process and a journey of discovery. I would also like to pay tribute to the collaboration between the Gender Equity team in KIT and Oxfam Novib. This collaboration has been about furthering gender knowledge and this is the second publication in this collaboration. Whereas it is unorthodox to make special mention of persons within development bureaucracies who have given life to these collaborations, I would like to thank Gerard Steehouwer of Oxfam Novib for seeing the potential of action research as a learning process on gender and development and supporting for the second time a publication to capture the learning.

Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay  
Social Development and Gender Equity,  
KIT, November 2012

# Acknowledgements

The development of this book has been a collaborative effort by many people, but first of all by the WAGIC family – the women and men who made the West Africa Gender Inclusive Citizenship programme happen: Souley Adji, Fatim Ba, Rahamatou Diarra, Badiane Marie-Claire Diatta, Mariam Diawarra, Daouda Diop, Sekou Doumbia, Gnilane Faye, Rokhaya Gaye, Fatou Gaye Cissé, Zeinabou Hadari, Balkissa Hamidou, Nana Hekoye, Ibrahima Koreissi, Idrissa Larabou, Hortense Lougue, Fatimata Mounkaila, Djingarey Maiga, Youssoupha Ndiaye, Noëlie Ouedraogo, Abdourahmane Ousmane, Hassanou Mallam Sani, Binta Sarr, Mohammedou Cheikh Fall, Blandine Tondé and Moussa Traore. They share their experiences and insights through the case stories in this book, and they helped draw the lessons learned which form the basis for the rest of the book.

We are very grateful to Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, the Social Development and Gender Equity arealeader at KIT, who had the original idea for the WAGIC program and accompanied us from the beginning to the end. Also many thanks to the colleagues from KIT who joined on the way and provided essential inputs and other support, particularly Inge Voss, Elsbet Lodenstein, Chris Hunter, Franz Wong and Katrine Danielsen, and Emma Jasperse who worked with us as an intern. We are also grateful for the great help of Kirsty Milward with english language editing, of Coumba Toure and Codou Bop with interpretation and facilitation, of Elisabeth Dramé for comments on Chapters 2 and 3, and of Aminata Sow with the translation of the book into French.

We would like to thank Oxfam Novib for their generous financial support to the WAGIC programme and this publication, and CORDAID for providing a grant.

It was a pleasure and an honour to develop, coordinate and document the West Africa Gender Inclusive Citizenship Programme. These experiences have inspired us. We hope this book will inspire you.

*Ayesha Imam and Evelien Kamminga*

**Dr. Ayesha Mei-Tje Imam** has lectured and carried out research in women's studies and gender analysis at universities and research institutes in Nigeria, the U.K., Canada and Senegal, as well as with international NGOs and development organizations across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the Americas. She has published widely for both academic and activist uses. She has been an activist for women's rights, human rights, democracy, and sustainable development for over two decades. She was the founding director of BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights in Nigeria, which focuses on women's human rights under customary, statutory and religious laws, and was the Head of Culture, Gender and Human Rights for UNFPA. She has been on the boards of the international solidarity network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), Greenpeace International, and the International Council for Human Rights Policy, amongst others.

**Evelien Kamminga** is a social anthropologist with over 25 years of experience in the field of gender, rights and development. She has worked in Somalia, Kenya, Mali and Namibia with the ILO, SNV Netherlands Development Organisation and international and local NGO's on women's employment, household energy, water and sanitation and natural resources management. In the Netherlands, she worked as a university researcher and NGO policy advisor. Since 2004 as a member of the Social Development and Gender Equity team of KIT she works with southern partners to develop, understand and document approaches that promote the rights, inclusion and participation of marginalized social groups, particularly women and children, in development processes.



Some of the WAGIC Family at the 'Writeshop' – Dakar, 2011



# Acronyms

AGEIM	AGEIM Consulting Engineers Burkina Faso
APROFES	Association pour la Promotion de la Femme Sénégalaise – Association for the Promotion of Senegalese Women
ASCOM	Community Assistant (Senegal)
AWID	Association for Women’s Rights in Development
DEME SO	Clinique Juridique et Association DEME SO – An association for legal assistance (Mali)
FDH	Femmes et Droits Humaines / Women and Human Rights (Mali)
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
KIT	Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen – Royal Tropical Institute
MDFC	Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance, (Senegal)
MHU	Ministry of Habitat and Urban Planning (Senegal)
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
RADI	Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré – African Network for Integrated Development (Senegal)
RADZ	Regional Agency for Development in Ziguinchor (Senegal)
RBA	rights-based approach to development
REFECE	Women’s Groups of the Community of Enampore (Senegal)
SYA	Songtaab-Yalgré Association – Songtaab-Yalgré, (Burkina Faso)
URD	Union for the Republic and Democracy, political party in Mali
USOFORAL	Comité régional de solidarité des femmes pour la paix en Casamance – Regional Committee of Women’s Solidarity for Peace in the Casamance (Senegal)
WAGIC	West Africa Gender Inclusive Citizenship Programme
WLUML	Women Living under Muslim Laws



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 What this book is about

This publication shares the experiences and knowledge generated in the context of the West Africa Gender Inclusive Citizenship (WAGIC) programme. Women's and human rights organisations in Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger were strengthened and enabled to facilitate local women organising themselves to investigate rights violations, build voice, undertake collective action and claim their rights as citizens. Participatory action research was the main method utilised.

As in most of the world, women in West Africa, especially poor women, are not fully recognised as citizens with rights. At different levels, they face both formal and informal restrictions that impede their enjoyment of civil and political rights as well as social and economic rights that entitle them to access resources, make choices and expand their opportunities. To help address this, KIT (the Royal Tropical Institute of the Netherlands), with funding from Oxfam-NOVIB, initiated the WAGIC programme, which took place from 2007 to 2011.

With WAGIC, we wished to find out – in specific West African contexts – what gender inclusive citizenship means as a practice, what can be achieved when it is promoted, the role action research can play, and how gender inclusive citizenship can be promoted. More precisely, this publication is about women devising ways to exercise citizenship and making their rights real. It is about women working on rights and thereby furthering their understanding of citizenship. It is about women developing 'voice,' speaking for themselves and claiming rights. It is about women developing their own agency and acting for themselves. And it is about women investigating and addressing institutional barriers in order to make their rights real.

Citizenship is a powerful word, with connotations of respect, rights and dignity. Citizenship rights can be formal or informal and can be derived from people's membership in different 'communities' – family, community, state, world. Citizenship describes the terms, conditions and benefits of membership. Inclusive citizenship is about how people understand and claim citizenship and the rights they associate with it (Kabeer 2005).

The theory and practice of gender inclusive citizenship requires working with a rights-based approach to development, wherein process and outcome are equally important. The rights-based approach to development (RBA) can help to strengthen the status of citizens from beneficiaries of development to rightful and legitimate claimants. Our understanding of the RBA goes beyond a 'human rights approach' to focus on rights in practice – including how men and women experience them differently. In addition, our approach has a bottom up and

actor-oriented perspective, which is based on the recognition that rights are shaped through actual struggles that are informed by people's own understandings of what they are justly entitled to, rather than normative textual definitions of them (Nyamu-Musembi 2005). The meaning of citizenship (in terms of the practice of citizenship and rights outcomes) is therefore by definition context specific (Goetz 2007; Mukhopadhyay and Singh 2009; Mukhopadhyay and Singh 2007; Nyamu-Musembi 2007).

Thus the point of departure of the action research projects was a problem defined in terms of a specific rights failure, which involved clarifying the links between human rights in formal definitions to national law and to the local rights situation/regime. Building on these considerations, the WAGIC programme set out with the following understanding of gender inclusive citizenship:

- It is a status, involving rights: citizenship status can be derived from being a member of different communities (family, community, district, state); rights can be derived from different rights systems or rights regimes (human rights; statutory or formal rights; customary rights, religious rights). Accessing these rights, however, should not be dependent on one's position in social relations (e.g. gender, class, race, ethnicity).
- It is an identity: being a citizen implies an awareness of the right to have rights, which are usually related to aspects of recognition and distribution of resources. Experiences of and lived meanings of citizenship are context specific.
- It is a practice: being a citizen implies agency and participation in decision making in its broadest sense.

Participatory action research was selected as the most appropriate methodology to engage women as rights holding citizens in an investigation of rights failures, building voice and agency, and subsequently in rights claiming (see Chapter 1.3). Local civil society was considered to be in an appropriate position to facilitate the action research process, with capacity building and technical support from KIT.

## 1.2 The WAGIC programme

This book does not stand alone as it is the second product of collaboration between Oxfam-NOVIB and the Social Development and Gender Equity area in KIT. The previous book, *Politics of the Possible: Gender Mainstreaming and Organisational Change*, was about experiences and voices from the field on how abstract issues such as gender equality and gender mainstreaming could be translated into practice and the many difficulties, negotiations and compromises involved in this translation (Mukhopadhyay, Steehouwer and Wong 2006). Innovative approaches to develop the capacity of civil society to advance gender equality and rights have been central to both initiatives.

The overall objective of the West Africa Gender Inclusive Citizenship (WAGIC) programme was to promote gender inclusive citizenship and better access for women to social, political and economic rights in Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The specific objectives were to: 1) strengthen the capacity of civil society to promote gender inclusive citizenship and women's rights outcomes through action research; and 2) generate and disseminate know-

ledge about promoting gender inclusive citizenship and realising social, political and economic rights outcomes in contexts where both rights holders and duty bearers are extremely resource-poor, the socio-political context is variably democratic, and Islam is the principal religion.

Five projects were undertaken in three themes that were identified as being of key importance to women's lives in the four countries during the preparation phase of the programme: 1) economic rights (e.g. access to and control over natural resources); 2) women's representation and participation in local governance; and 3) access to justice in cases of physical and sexual violence.

A key assumption of the programme was that local civil society can play a vital role in enhancing gender inclusive citizenship and realising women's rights. WAGIC's implementation partners were therefore local women's and human rights organisations, who were invited to participate on the basis of their track record in and commitment to the promotion of gender equality and women's rights, and their interest in jointly learning to work in new ways and share their experiences with other practitioners and activists. Capacity building of civil society partners was therefore a major objective and also a cross cutting programme strategy. Linking and learning between the partners at a regional level was another core strategy. Facilitating participatory action research was the main strategy for engaging local women, to increase their consciousness about their rights, to build their voice and work with them towards the realisation of their rights.

Thus the WAGIC programme was a partnership between KIT and a number of women's rights and human rights organisations committed to contributing to the concrete realisation of women's rights in one of the three selected theme areas. These organisations were keen to learn more not only about applying a rights-based approach to development but also about using action research as a methodology and approach. The programme started with nine organisations and ended with seven. The seven organisations that participated from beginning to end are listed in the table on p. 14.

More information on each organisation can be found in Part II. The two organisations which joined the programme temporarily were: l'Association d'Appui et d'Éveil Pugsada (ADEP) – Association for Assistance of Adolescent Girls in Burkina Faso; and le Réseau des Femmes Pour la Paix (REFEPA) – Network of Women for Peace in Niger.

Each organisation had some experience working on gender equality and women's rights, but only five considered themselves to be 'women's organisations..' DEME SO and Alternative were working for the advancement of human rights in general but had not yet fully embraced the ideas that women's rights are also human rights and that access to rights is influenced by gender relations.

The organisations had hands-on experience working with rights-based approaches to development to variable degrees. Alternative was most advanced in this respect. They had, for example, been involved in supporting rights claiming by victims of mining pollution,

Country	Acronym	Organisation Name	Project
Senegal	APROFES	Association pour la Promotion de la Femme Sénégalaise Association for the Promotion of Senegalese Women	Joint project on access to justice <i>"Local Justice for Women: Breaking the Silence on Violence"</i>
	RADI	Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré African Network for Integrated Development	
	USOFORAL	Comité régional de solidarité des femmes pour la paix en Casamance / USOFORAL Regional Committee of Women's Solidarity for Peace in the Casamance / USOFORAL	Project on economic rights (landrights for women) <i>"Women Open the Debate on Access to Land: the case of the rural community of Enampore in Ziguinchor, Senegal"</i>
Mali	DEME SO	Clinique Juridique et Association DEME SO Legal Clinic and Association DEME SO (an association for legal and human rights assistance )	Joint project on political participation <i>"Coming Out of Obscurity: Political Participation of Women in Kati District"</i>
	FDH	Femmes et Droits Humaines Women and Human Rights	
Burkina Faso	Songtaab-Yalgré	Association Songtaab-Yalgré An association for women's income generation through shea butter	Project on economic rights of sheabutter producers <i>"Valuing the Socio-economic Rights of Women Producers of Shea Butter: A Case of Active Citizenship by the Women of Gampela, Burkina Faso"</i>
Niger	Alternative	Association Alternative Espaces Citoyens Association for Citizenship and Human Rights; member of International Alternatives (AlterInter)	Project on political participation <i>"The Struggle of Women in Zinder: An Irreversible Dynamic"</i>

with targeted lobbying and advocacy campaigns using social media such as community radio and lobbying at the World Social Forum in a process which aimed to hold duty bearers to account.

Songtaab-Yalgré held a slightly different position from the other organisations, as they are a producers' member organisation that helps women with the processing, marketing and

market development of shea nuts and shea butter, and thereby has a financial stake as an organisation itself. They also introduced organic production and obtained formal certification status which resulted in much higher selling prices for raw nuts and for the shea butter produced in their own factory. The certified organic shea butter is sold on the international market primarily as raw material for the cosmetics industry.

The two organisations in Mali decided to join forces in enhancing women's presence and influence in local government in Kati District. Both were already working in the district, DEME SO in rural areas [French: *commune rurale*] and FDH in urban areas [French: *commune urbaine*]. In Senegal also, two organisations formed a team: APROFES and RADI, both of which were already working on violence against women and women's access to justice in a district town, Kaolack, and a peri-urban area of Dakar- Sud-Yembeul, Pikine. In both Mali and Senegal, the teams consisted of one organisation that was broadly human rights oriented with strong legal expertise, while the other was an explicit women's organisation with strong training and social mobilisation skills and experience.

The programme took place over a period of 4.5 years (2007-2011) and had four phases: programme identification (one year); preparation (one year); implementation (two years); and documentation and dissemination (six months). It was coordinated jointly by a regional consultant, based in Senegal, and a KIT advisor from the Netherlands (the authors of this publication). In order to allow sufficient flexibility in the planning and implementation of the action research projects, and to optimize capacity development of and between partners, the programme worked with six-monthly planning cycles and six-monthly regional programme meetings to peer review progress reports and develop new plans. These meetings also provided ample opportunity for partners to learn from each other and to receive training on various conceptual and practical subjects and identified gaps. Eight such meetings were organised. In addition, there were half yearly combined monitoring and technical support field visits, in addition to support via email and Skype. Each participating organisation nominated two people to actively participate in the WAGIC workshops, usually a (senior) programme staff member with executive management responsibility and a person who was directly involved in the implementation. Throughout the programme, the sex ratio of participants from the NGOs was about 1/3 men and 2/3 women.

Towards the end, a 'writeshop' was organised with all the partners to synthesize the substantive and process results, and to develop case stories for each of the five projects. The full stories can be found in Part II of this book.

### 1.3 Participatory action research

Action-oriented research grew out of the need to make research processes better suited to informing policy and practice and to generate social action. There are different interpretations of what action research is, but essentially it is social research whereby the researchers try to bring about change in the system by solving concrete problems through generating critical knowledge that is useful for themselves, as well as for other practitioners and activists.

There are several major differences between conventional research and participatory action research. In the first place, in action research, the 'objects' of research become 'subjects,' which in WAGIC meant that the women concerned took the 'driver's seat.' In the second place, the research is an integral part of a process of empowerment and achieving social justice. Action researchers question, investigate and reflect on what they find and then decide on the next steps. And finally, there is a focus on generating practical knowledge to achieve social change and justice, and concrete changes in people's lives.

Experience elsewhere has shown that it is a particularly effective method and approach to unite women around a shared concern, engage them in joint analysis and reflection, and in organised rights claiming. The process engages participants in becoming active citizens, thus putting gender inclusive citizenship into practice (Morris 2002; Weiner 2004).

Action research is a form of non-positivist and interpretive research, in the sense that it seeks to empower practitioners to research and reflect on their own practice. This contrasts with, for example, 'being researched' by university researchers. Action research attempts to challenge conventional power relations between researchers and practitioners by legitimating practitioner knowledge as 'produced out of their own lived realities as professionals' (Weiner 2004; Anderson and Herr 1999:20; Morris 2002).

Good action research always has a strong learning component and the process is often quite similar to an 'action learning' process. Action learning derives its power from the repeated cycle of thinking about problems and challenges, going on to take action and returning to the learning group to reflect on the experience and plan further together. Fresh questions are the starting point on the action learning journey. The challenge is not to reach conclusions and quickly devise solutions once and for all, but to continue to push for more and new insights to address problems more deeply or further explore their changing contexts. Action learning is also an effective approach for organisational learning (Britton 2005; Danielsen 2008).

The WAGIC programme built on two previous action research initiatives undertaken by the Social Development and Gender Equity area of KIT:

*The Muslim Women and Development Action Research Project (1998-2001)*

This project took place in seven countries, including Mali and Senegal, and developed insights into the ways in which Muslim women use religious and cultural resources in supporting their reproductive and educational rights (Mukhopadhyay 2001; Mukhopadhyay 2001a; Mukhopadhyay 2001b).

*The Gender, Governance and Citizenship programme (1999-2002)*

This programme tried to increase the accountability of governance institutions to women's rights and interests, through building poor and marginalized women's voice and representation in eight countries in Southern Africa and South Asia (Mukhopadhyay and Meer 2004).

Action research requires good facilitation and readiness to critically engage with the state and other duty bearing institutions. Therefore WAGIC worked with local women's rights and human rights organisations, helped them strengthen their capacities and provided them with technical support.



Action research processes are dynamic and multi-faceted, making assessments of the quality of the process complex. The following questions have been suggested for reviewing the quality of action research initiatives and these questions will be answered throughout this book.

**Outcome validity** : *Did it solve the problem?*

**Process validity** : *Was the activity educative and informative?*

**Democratic validity**: *Was the research undertaken in collaboration with all involved with the problem under investigation?*

**Catalytic validity** : *Did the research transform the realities of those involved?*

**Dialogic validity** : *Could the research be discussed with peers in different settings? (Weiner 2004)*



# PART I



## 2 Practising citizenship and claiming rights

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the substantive outcomes of the five action research projects, thus the results of women increasingly practicing inclusive citizenship and claiming rights in the three theme areas of the programme: women's political participation, access to justice in cases of physical and sexual violence, and economic rights. The WAGIC partners have written down their own experiences in the form of case stories. These can be found in Part II of the book. This chapter synthesizes and analyses the results from the different projects by theme. First the theme will be introduced and then the changes achieved discussed. In the next chapter, we will bring together a synthesis of the lessons learned. Emphasis is placed on the views of the women who were the subjects and drivers of the action research.

### 2.2 Political representation and participation in local governance

#### *What the theme is about*

For women citizens to take part in decision making on an equal basis with men, they must be present in equal numbers and power in those institutional sites where decisions are made. Women's equal political participation is a matter of equity concerning women's equal right to participate in decisions that affect their lives – to an equal share in governance. But it is important to realise that this involves a redistribution of political/public power which has historically been overwhelmingly in the hands of men (Mukhopadhyay, Hunter and Milward 2010). This to some extent explains the resistance that men often display when women begin to enter public spaces of decision making (Nicolaisen 2012; UNIFEM 2008).

In Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Senegal, opportunities for political participation were expected to improve for citizens in general and women in particular with the decentralization processes that were initiated in the 1990s with the 'good governance agenda' and support of the donor community. Local government is widely held to be more women-friendly than national government and of particular significance as a political apprenticeship arena for women. Gender-specific access barriers to politics – such as mobility requirements, a large disposable income, education, experience, and connections – are expected to be lower at local levels and the focus at local level on basic community services is thought to be of practical interest to women (Goetz and Jenkins 2004).

However, the available statistics for the four countries do not bear this out. This is not surprising, as a survey conducted in 67 countries by the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), an umbrella organisation for cities, local governments and municipal associations

throughout the world, shows similar results globally. That is, there is not a consistently higher proportion of women in local government than in national parliaments anywhere in the world except Latin and Central America, and women in council leadership positions are a rare phenomenon everywhere. The survey found that the average proportion of women in local councils was just 20.9% – not greatly different from the global average of women in national parliaments which is 19.6%.<sup>1</sup>

In the four WAGIC countries, women's representation in national parliament was as follows in March 2012: Mali 10.2%, Niger 13.3%, Burkina Faso 15.3% and Senegal 22.7%.<sup>2</sup> Reliable figures for representation at local government level are not available, but clearly women are also extremely under-represented in local government and turnout at local elections is generally very low.

Interventions that promote women's political participation focus generally on getting women into office, mainly through quota systems and capacity building of individual women leaders. While measures to get more women into office are necessary given the 'democratic deficit', evidence in most elected bodies shows that it is not sufficient to guarantee women's substantive influence on decision making. Getting women into governance institutions does not by itself guarantee political decisions that further gender equality or women's rights. Women are not a homogenous group, and come from very varied socially structured positions according to class, ethnicity etc., and this may influence decisions in ways that prioritize other aspects of their social identities. Therefore, increasing women's representation and participation in governance, is not simply about numbers and influence. It is also about the need for women's strategic interests and gender equality concerns to be addressed in public policy decisions and resource allocations so that these better support women's rights in general (Mukhopadhyay, Hunter and Milward 2010). Donor-sponsored gender mainstreaming efforts, however, have not been successful in effectively changing state and party institutions to be responsive to poor women's concerns or accountable to achieving gender equality goals.

WAGIC included two projects which focused specifically on political rights – those of Alternative Espaces Citoyens (Alternative) in Niger and the joint project of Femmes et Droits Humains (FDH) and the Clinique Juridique DEME SO (DS) in Mali.

Alternative's project objectives were to study the provisions and implementation of the 2000 Quota Law, which mandated a minimum of 10% representation of either sex in elected positions, and 25% in nominated positions, and to take action to ensure women's quantitative and qualitative representation in politics, focusing on the Zinder Region.

FDH-DS's project objective was to promote inclusive citizenship and political rights for women, by strengthening their influence on political and public decision making in local government in Kati municipality and Siby rural community [French: *Communes*]. Rural communes and urban municipalities are the lowest tier in Malian government.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/world310312.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/world310312.htm); [www.cities-localgovernments.org/uclg/index.asp](http://www.cities-localgovernments.org/uclg/index.asp)

<sup>2</sup> [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif310312.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif310312.htm)

Both projects aimed to contribute to constructing more substantive representation of women and also expand the scope and depth of participation of women as citizens in public decision making. Building the accountability of state institutions and political parties for gender equality was a third aim. The full stories can be found in Part II of this book:

- *Coming out of obscurity: Women's political participation of women within Kati District (Mali)*
- *The struggle of women in Zinder: 'An irreversible dynamic' (Niger)*

### **What was achieved**

The two projects each in their own way, made progress on: 1) more substantive representation of women; 2) expanding the scope and depth of participation of women as citizens in public decision making; and 3) building accountability of state institutions and political parties for gender equality.

Using mass media, as well as public meetings, the projects raised awareness about women's rights to participate in political and electoral activities and the importance of their doing so. They also directly supported women speaking for themselves by enabling women candidates to speak on the radio. In Mali, this built on prior relationships of FDH with several community radios, so that they all aired programmes on women's rights and interviews with candidates at the same time. In Niger, Alternative developed a series of journal articles and radio programmes about women's political rights, as well as interviews with women candidates, which were aired both on their own radio station and by other community radios.

Competing agendas often arise when advocating for women, and frequently the women's agenda is sacrificed for some other goal. However, in the 2009 local and parliamentary elections, Alternative prioritized the gender justice issue by calling on political parties to field, support and vote for women candidates. This was at a time when several opposition parties called for a boycott of the elections as a protest against the government. Alternative took the political and reputational risk of being branded as pro-government by asking for prioritization of women's right to be elected in those parties willing to participate in the elections.

### **Quantitative Gains**

Both projects resulted in specific gains in increasing numbers of elected women and therefore the political power of women. In Niger, the numerical gain and attribution to the project was clear. For instance, a woman participant in the project, whose name did not appear on the elected list, realised that the quota law had not been applied. She complained first to her party, which was not willing to take action, and then, with the support of the action research group and Alternative, directly to the procurator of the electoral tribunal in Zinder – earning thus the sobriquet '*conseillère fait à Alternative*' (councillor made by Alternative). Similarly, another participant was able to insist that her name be first on the party list, which significantly improved her chance of winning – and she was elected. In Mali, the numerical results were mixed – although in the 2009 local elections, the number of women councillors in the District [French: *Cercle*] of Kati rose overall (from 37 in 2004 to

67), in Kati Municipality itself, it dropped (from five in 2004 to four). In Siby Community, however, the first ever woman councillor was elected and she was an active participant in the project.

### **Qualitative Gains**

The Mali project also focused on improving the effectiveness of women as politicians. Within each of the two project areas, the elected councillors and political candidates organised into small action research groups [French: *groupe restreinte*] which met to support and strengthen each other (within Kati and Siby municipalities and across them). The groups' intent was to represent women's interests across party lines, and to report back to and be accountable to the larger group of women constituents. An action which strengthened them in doing so was to collect and analyse their own party documents, often against resistance from local party officials. All the documents formally include policies on gender representation and interests in the party bureau and electoral lists. This had been unknown to the women and not implemented by parties. Fortified by their newly gained knowledge and experience, these two groups advocated revisions of the electoral lists. In doing so, the women political activists challenged the local party structures, which resulted in public promises from the Secretaries of the five main local parties for better positioning of women in the lists and in party positions. In other words, the women put forward a claim for both recognition of women's right to equal representation and for redistribution of power.

In addition, the four elected councillors in Kati and the one woman in Siby formed a network of women councillors in the Commune of Kati (which is also open to the women councillors from the other municipalities in the Commune). Hence, the councillor responsible for environmental sanitation in Kati mobilised, in partnership with women's groups, the Mayor of Kati and the Ministry of the Environment for the implementation of sanitation activities, and toured the market to check the hygiene of butchers, thereby not only establishing visibility but also demanding accountability for implementation. Similarly, Kati women councillors organised to raise funds from the Town Hall and the Ministry of Environment and inserted their concerns on the agenda of the fiftieth anniversary of the City Council. These are examples of individual women beginning to use their political influence in the interest of women as a group and is a significant change.

In Niger, Alternative's project produced a solid analysis of the quota law texts. The procurator of the Zinder electoral tribunal was so impressed that he found it difficult to believe it resulted from an action research project of local women, rather than an 'expert' study. This recognition helped the action research team and their work to be respected. The analysis concluded that the difficulty in achieving the result of a minimum of 10% representation in electoral positions and 25% in nominated positions of either gender, resulted from deficiencies in the drafting of the law, rather than flaws or obstacles in interpretation or implementation. However, the obvious follow-up to this, of effecting changes in the quota law to remedy its defects, was obstructed by events in the political context of Niger. In 2009 there was a constitutional crisis as then-President Tandja attempted to have a third term despite the term limit proscribed in the 1999 Constitution.



This resulted in the military coup of 2010 and an interim government. These events made efforts for reform of a single law difficult – and this difficulty was further exacerbated by a new attempt to pass a Family Law [French: *Code de la Famille*]. First drafted in 1993, this bill was again defeated, among other reasons due to the rise of a vociferous Muslim religious right in this period when the government had a weak bargaining position.

Experience elsewhere has shown that states, including Muslim majority states, are likely to adopt policies and legislation that support women's rights when the following conditions are met: religious elites do not mobilise against reform and governments have strong bargaining power – and when women's rights coalitions mobilise for reform (Kang 2010). In this instance, however, many of those who might have supported the Family Law in principle did not want to appear to lend legitimacy to the non-elected interim government. Furthermore the women's rights coalitions had little time in which to mobilise.

Hence, the plans for massive mobilisation for reform in the law were stymied. Nonetheless the Alternative project was able to build alliances with the wider women's movements and take a lead in this coalition to develop a proposal for reforming the quota law. The proposal was received appreciatively by the Ministry of Women's Affairs [French: *Ministère de la promotion de la femme*] as a basis for their further work on this issue. Still, Alternative and the coalition will need to mobilise further.

Working on women's substantive representation in politics also required addressing the accountability of political parties to implement the existing laws, regulations and procedures on women's representation. In Mali, this was through a campaign to create visibility and recognition of the failures of the electoral lists and the unfair gender composition of the local party bureaus. In Niger, this was through the demand to implement the provisions of the quota law. When one party refused to do so, the candidate – with the support of the project – had recourse to the tribunal, hence also demanding the accountability of the state to implement the quota law.

Similarly, both projects worked to expand the scope of women as citizens in decision making at different levels. In Niger, the women worked with Alternative to build a coalition with other parts of a broader social movement to specifically focus on women's rights. In Mali, women councillors met with women constituents to build pressure for and achieve funding for women's activities. The women councillors also became actively involved in the elaboration of sectoral development programmes in their communes. In both countries, women political activists became more involved with decision making in their local parties as a result of the projects, especially around the positioning of women candidates in the electoral lists.

While these two WAGIC projects focused explicitly on enhancing women's entitlements to political participation, the three other projects also utilised political (as well as other) channels to contest women's economic rights and access to justice. They thereby also contributed to building women's voice and their effective influence on public decision making.

For instance, in Burkina Faso, Songtaab-Yalgré’s work on restitution for women’s loss of income due to infrastructural development led to greater recognition of the particular needs and interests of women producers and, as a result, these will be included in future community development planning. The access to justice project of RADI-APROFES in Senegal resulted not only in women becoming more active in community citizenship structures, but also in creating voice. They demanded accountability from the state for realising women’s health rights (via a protests against the closing of a health centre), and for realising women’s and girls’ right to freedom from violence in schools and on the streets.

The following table provides a summary of the main strategies that were used in Mali and Niger to claim the rights of women’s participation in public decision making. These strategies, however, over-generalized because rights claiming, to be effective, will always be context specific.

Strategies	Actions in Mali	Actions in Niger
<b>1 Increasing substantive representation</b>		
Increasing the number of elected women in local government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>raise public awareness in general and of women voters in particular</li> <li>campaign for women to become candidates and for people to vote for women</li> <li>investigate party policies and claim the right to be on their party’s election list</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>investigate the non-implementation of the quota law</li> <li>work towards better content of the quota law</li> <li>raise public awareness in general and of women in particular</li> <li>investigate party policies and claim the right to be on their party’s election list, which resulted in more women elected</li> </ul>
Improving elected women’s effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>build capacities of women political activists through training and coaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>train and build capacity of women political activists</li> </ul>
Women political activists increasing their own effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provide opportunity to elected women to form an action research group and benefit from collective reflection and learning</li> </ul>	
<b>2 Increasing scope and depth of women’s participation in public decision making</b>		
Engaging in law reform		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>build alliance for law reform</li> <li>contribute to formulation of new draft law</li> </ul>
Supporting elected women in choosing topics of women’s strategic interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>series of initiatives to influence local government, e.g. on urban sanitation and transparency of use of tax money collected from market vendors</li> </ul>	
<b>3 Enhancing accountability of state institutions and political parties for gender equality</b>		
Women demanding accountability from duty bearers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>women claim more equal representation on party lists and higher number of effective seats within local party bureaus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zinder electoral tribunal invoked in a successful case</li> <li>Zinder electoral tribunal will be monitored when implementing the new quota law</li> <li>women claim more equal representation on party lists</li> </ul>

## 2.3 Access to justice

### *What the theme is about*

Research indicates that gender discrimination happens in law in three ways: a) actively, by writing different prescriptions for men and women into legislation; b) passively, by not legislating on issues which undermine women's rights; and c) through inconsistencies between civil or constitutional law and customary /personal law, which legislates marriage, divorce, guardianship and family property issues in many countries (WLUML 2006).<sup>3</sup> Women's legal position, however, is not only framed by the content of law, but also by the extent to which they can access it, and the extent to which it is likely to work in their interests.<sup>4</sup> Accessing justice involves the physical and economic capacity to engage legal processes, as well as the capacity of the legal procedures to deliver justice unbiased by gender discrimination (Smart 1989). Women's access to justice is frequently constrained on both counts. In this sense, when women resort to the judicial system to claim their rights, gender biases are reflected in the decisions of the courts responsible for the interpretation of law (Shaheed et al 1998, Mukhopadhyay and Quintero 2008).

Legal pluralism and the existence of multiple judicial institutions (customary, religious and state) often compound the problems of access to justice for women (WLUML 2006, UN Women 2011). This is the case in Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal, where women's access to justice is mediated by both informal and formal institutions.<sup>5</sup> Customary and religious law play a crucial role in determining the real entitlements at the grassroots level for both women and men. Although both formal and informal legal systems and institutions tend to be male biased and contribute to further discrimination against women, they also all have the capacity to change. An example is the recent abolishment of female genital mutilation (FGM) by the traditional authorities of over 50 rural communities in Mali and in Senegal. The practice was widespread in both countries despite differences in the laws: FGM is not formally prohibited by law in Mali but is illegal in Senegal. However in both situations, the abolition of FGM in customary norms resulted in a diminution of its practice in in these communities

In all four countries, statutory frameworks (e.g. family law) increasingly conform to international human rights standards, but inadequate mechanisms for implementation (such as a law on child maintenance, but no system for assessing maintenance or facilitating payment), poor enforcement of laws and the failure to hold those responsible for enforcement accountable, combine with prevailing patriarchal norms and values to deny women's rights. In addition, women's ideas of justice, equity and fairness seldom resonate in any of the formal or informal legal decision-making arenas.

<sup>3</sup> For a good overview see also UN Women (2011)

<sup>4</sup> See for example Albertyn (2005); WiLDAF-WA (2004).

<sup>5</sup> See WiLDAF-WA (2004).

In order to support greater access of women and girls to justice, and thereby promote gender inclusive citizenship and women's rights, it was important to: investigate the barriers experienced by poor women in formal/state and customary legal institutions; work on improving both formal and/or informal justice delivery for women; and to generate knowledge for development policy makers and practitioners on civil society strategies to secure fair outcomes for women and girls.

The full story can be found in Part II of this book:

- *Local Justice for Women: breaking the silence on violence (Senegal)*

### ***What was achieved***

One of the five WAGIC projects addressed the access to justice theme. It was a collaboration between two Senegalese NGOs, Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré (RADI) and Association Pour la Promotion de la Femme Sénégalaise (APROFES). They worked on a project to improve the access to justice of women and girls subjected to sexual violence in Sud-Yeumbeul (a poor neighbourhood in Pikine, a borough of the capital city, Dakar) and in Thioffack (a suburb of the town of Kaolack, a four hour drive south of Dakar). Both organisations already had considerable experience in campaigning against violence, and providing support to women and girls who have experienced it (legal advice, counselling, and accompanying through both formal and informal justice processes).

Initial focus-group discussions (FGDs) in both sites confirmed APROFES' and RADI's impression that even of the cases reported to the police, less than half of the complainants have recourse to formal justice processes, despite Senegal's relatively strong legal framework on violence against women. The data they collected also highlighted some of the barriers to women using or benefiting from formal legal processes. Their research showed that not wishing to be (held) responsible for the imprisonment of their husbands is one reason why married women choose informal mediation, such as by family elders, religious leaders or village heads, when they suffer marital violence.<sup>6</sup> In addition, sexual abuse within marriage (e.g. marital rape) is barely or not at all recognised: neither in statutory law; nor in the dominant conservative interpretations of religion (Muslim for most people, or Christian); nor in custom (of Wolof, Toucouleur or Lebou people, for instance). Further, some level of physical violence by husbands is tolerated by women themselves, as well as communities generally and authorities.<sup>7</sup> Hence it is generally only in the most extreme cases that mediation focuses first on protecting women's (wives') right to freedom from violence. As a result, most cases of sexual violence that go to formal legal processes are of girls or young unmarried women, where strong sentences for perpetrators have more approval from the communities.<sup>8</sup> Yet the formal system has difficulties in terms of cost,

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<sup>6</sup> It might also be noted that when husbands are imprisoned, the consequence of the loss of income they may contribute to the family/household can be severe, especially in poor households. However, even in households where women the main or only income provider, they would avoid being held responsible for the imprisonment of their children's father.

<sup>7</sup> In all three systems; the police are notorious for counseling women to go home and be patient.

<sup>8</sup> Though still pressure may be brought on the girls and their families not to initiate a case because of perceived damage to her or her family's reputation, or by influential friends of the alleged aggressor.

unfamiliarity and lack of a supportive environment (including within the police and judicial systems) and both organisations noted that outcomes for women and girls are variable.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, the RADI-APROFES project had two strategies: empowering women to use the formal legal system and engaging the informal mediation system to better protect girls' and women's right to freedom from violence. Both were predicated on intervening in the public discourses around violence against women and girls, so that it would be considered a serious offence that the authorities (customary, state and religious) have to address, and that women and girls would be able to make public complaints resulting in protection and redress, without feeling shame and embarrassment. The project engaged in a series of linked activities – initial focus group discussions with survivors, followed by open meetings with women, community theatre, and then publicly engaging with religious leaders, customary authorities, state functionaries, community organisations, youth associations and the like. This resulted in significant outcomes in terms of innovations in the language and practice around violence against women, showing more respect for women's and girls' bodily integrity.

In both sites, even in the short project implementation period of 24 months, women spoke up publicly more and more about violence. The Mayor of South-Yeumbeul committed to support the fight against violence against women and girls. The principals of schools in South-Yeumbeul committed to supporting the establishment of committees of struggle in their schools. The Imams of Thioffack encouraged the reporting of violence and pledged to advocate against impunity (i.e. to prevent perpetrators of violence not being held accountable for their actions). Community structures of both women and men (the Alliance for Community Action in Thioffack and the Consultation Framework in Sud-Yeumbeul) were set up or reinvigorated and specifically charged with ensuring advocacy and respect for rights, alerting authorities about violations, and providing support and advice to sufferers of violations. Several cases have already been taken up by them (including some referred to them by the police for support). Women have thus been empowered in both communities to speak up about violence and supported to report violations and to pursue redress.

For these positive changes in the socio-cultural normative systems to actually result in just resolutions for women in informal mediation, they obviously need to be taken on board by the mediators. The two major avenues for informal mediation have been within the extended family (older family members – often, but not only, men) and at neighbourhood level (religious leaders, district delegates etc.). In this respect, the pronouncements in public meetings of religious leaders and delegates are encouraging. However, another concern was that the commonly accepted objective of informal mediation is a 'win-win' solution for peace in the family. In practice, this has often meant that women's interests and rights are subordinated for 'family peace,' and 'social cohesion..' To move towards the objective of 'justice and peace,' the RADI-APROFES project undertook – with some trepidation – training with a group of traditional mediators on mediation with respect for women's

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<sup>9</sup> Similar findings have emerged from research in a wide range of countries. For an overview of research see Heise (2011)

rights (e.g. their bodily integrity). To their surprise, this was enthusiastically received by the participants, although it was too soon to judge its effectiveness. Further follow up was required with systematic monitoring of mediation outcomes (see the section in the next chapter on continued outcomes, after the end of the projects, 3.13).

Strategies	Actions
<b>1 Creating positive change in the socio-cultural normative system</b>	
Intervening in public discourses around violence to increase respect for women and girls' bodily integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• build capacity of community theatre groups to address rights violations</li> <li>• publicly engage with religious leaders, customary authorities, state functionaries, community organisations, youth associations etc.</li> <li>• obtain commitment from religious leaders, state functionaries, community organisations to take specific actions to prevent gender-based violence and/or support redress and prevent impunity of perpetrators</li> </ul>
Engaging schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• obtain commitment from principals to set up committees in their schools with the aim to address gender-based violence</li> </ul>
<b>2 Empowering women to speak up</b>	
Awareness raising and mobilisation of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organise focus group discussions with survivors of physical or sexual violence</li> <li>• hold open meetings with community women</li> <li>• encourage women to go to community theatre on violence</li> <li>• publicly engage community organisations, youth associations etc.</li> </ul>
<b>3 Engaging the informal system to better protect girls' and women's right to freedom of violence</b>	
Building capacity of informal mediators to respect women's rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide training on 'justice and peace' to religious leaders, politicians and delegates and others responsible for mediation</li> </ul>
Critical monitoring of outcomes of mediation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• set up system to monitor outcomes of informal mediation, including criteria on respect for girls' and women's bodily integrity and other rights agreed to in capacity development trajectory</li> </ul>
<b>4 Enabling women to use the formal legal system</b>	
Reducing financial constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• as NGO, provide free legal advice</li> <li>• provide information on available channels for access of state legal aid funds</li> <li>• encourage communities to establish fund for support to costs of medical certificates and legal fees</li> <li>• advocacy and lobbying for medical certificates provided free</li> </ul>
Claiming access rights from duty bearers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advocacy and lobbying to enable NGOs to be civil parties in cases involving human rights violations</li> </ul>

To facilitate access to the formal legal system, beyond the free legal advice and counselling already provided by RADi and APROFES, the RADi-APROFES project provided information to women's community associations about existing avenues of accessing state legal aid funds – the budgets for which had often been retired unspent for lack of applications. In addition, both the Alliance for Community Action and the Consultation Framework have set up funds to support costs associated with accessing the formal legal system (medical

certificates, legal fees etc.). The cost of medical certificates (required to prove injury) has been a major obstacle for women to access the formal system. The project has been working on having medical certificates provided free in instances of violence against women. This is an example of a redistribution claim as it will reduce the costs for women in accessing justice. So far this has been strongly resisted by doctors defending a source of income,<sup>10</sup> (although there are some who do so free on a voluntary basis). Another long-term objective, which RADI and APROFES continue to work on, is part of a broader social justice initiative, to enable NGOs to be a civil party in cases involving human rights violations.

The table on page 30 summarizes the strategies and actions applied in the context of the action research project on access to justice. Some of the actions go beyond the scope of this small action research project; they had already started and/or will continue after the end of the project. Similar to the strategies and actions in the area of political participation, these also have to be regarded as context specific.

## 2.4 Economic rights

### *What the theme is about*

Natural resources are crucial assets for a large proportion of the world's poorest people who depend on trees, forests, water resources and land for subsistence as well as market based livelihood activities. Yet who gets to use which resources, and for what purpose, is strongly influenced by gender as well as by other structures of social differentiation. Gender relations mediate not only rights of access to different natural resources, but also the different uses and benefits that men and women are entitled to derive from them. This means that while men and women's interests in different resources may often have much in common, they may also conflict (Masika and Joekees 1997).

While poor men and poor women both suffer from curtailed rights to livelihoods, women's ability to claim the resources which sustain them is further truncated by gender relations which allocate men privilege in the *distribution* of natural resources, as well as privilege in *recognition* of their contributions to livelihoods, including those derived from natural resources (Mukhopadhyay, Hunter and Milward 2010).

In Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, men have typically stronger rights to valued resources such as land, water for irrigation and trees, and their labour contributions to livelihoods are acknowledged at both policy and community levels via ascribed household headship and breadwinner status. Yet, socially constructed divisions of labour cast women as primary users of natural resources and important providers for the household. At the same time, women are largely excluded from decision making concerning natural resource management. Their contributions – both to sustaining the environment and to household livelihoods – are also frequently overlooked and/or undervalued.

<sup>10</sup> It might be noted that doctors in public service, like teachers, had not been paid their salaries in several months, and this happens not infrequently.

In all four countries, women are important – though undervalued – actors in food production and small-scale trade. However, their entry into the formal sector and market economy remains limited because they cannot participate economically on equal terms with men, due to lack of resources and space to make choices. This means, in livelihoods terminology, that women have fewer social, economic, legal, and political assets, and mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination exist at all levels from local to global (see box).

- 1 Women are much less likely to own and control land than men, though they may be primarily responsible for a variety of agricultural tasks and have different degrees of control over agricultural products.
- 2 Women have less access to productive assets such as agricultural implements, ploughing bullocks and irrigation equipment, and are likely to have more control over those which generate lower economic returns (such as boiling pans for shea butter production).
- 3 Women's labour is partially tied up in reproductive and household caring activities and they have weak claims on others' labour, except to some extent over children's labour and through reciprocal labour arrangements.
- 4 They often have less education than men, although they may have specific knowledge which they derive from and apply to livelihood activities (Mukhopadhyay, Hunter and Milward 2010).

Women in all four countries have limited independent rights to land and other natural resources. Their usufruct rights (e.g. to pick shea nuts in Burkina Faso and to grow rice in the valleys in the Casamance, Senegal), are obtained through husbands or fathers, making women highly dependent on the quality of their relationships with male kin. Women's entitlements to land use are, however, acknowledged in customary law. Women's rights are often at risk of either receiving little recognition in the first place, or of being undermined in situations of conflict over land, sometimes by recourse to formal legal systems which interpret customary law in regressive terms (Mukhopadhyay and Quintero 2008). Experience has shown that strengthening women's legal and policy level rights to land and other resources needs to be complemented by measures to improve women's bargaining power at local level and the strength of their claims to those resources which are most productive or yield higher returns (Masika and Joekees 1997).

In this poorest region of the world, the livelihoods of the poor, especially women, are increasingly under pressure due to macro-economic factors, such as cotton trade liberalization, demographic, ecological and health factors, and conflict. Although new legislation is less discriminatory for women in terms of access to wealth-generating property and inheritance, customary practices still prevail and, with competition for resources, women and young men tend to be the weakest players. Work on the situation of 'landless' women in the context of decentralization and changing legislation in West Africa has been undertaken by IIED (Diarra and Monimart 2006b; Diarra and Monimart 2006a) and by FAO (FAO Dimitra 2008). Research on the gender issues related to shea butter production and different kinds of value chains (local, regional and global) has been undertaken by Elias and Saussey (Elias and Carney 2004; Saussey 2010; Saussey, Moity-Maizy and Muchnik 2008).

As elsewhere in the world, rights claims have taken greater root in political and civil rights than in economic rights. Although both require resource costs (for instance state funding of the police and judicial systems for political and civil rights), there is much greater



resistance to economic rights, which imply a transfer of resources from the rich to the poor and, from men to women, as well as less support as neo-liberal economic policy<sup>11</sup> has come to dominate. Political and civil rights tend to be seen as ‘absolute’ and non-negotiable, whereas economic, social and cultural rights have tended to be formulated as ‘relative’ and context specific, especially when applied to women’s rights. The principle of progressive realisation – although it actually obliges states to take steps to achieve the full realisation of rights to the maximum available resources – has often been cited to justify non-fulfilment of social, cultural and economic rights, as what ‘the maximum available resources’ are can always be debated. Government and donor strategies to enhance women’s economic position are usually restricted to income generation activities and provision of micro-credit for women rather than enhancing their economic entitlements, based on recognition of women as producers with rights to redistribution of resources.

For the projects in this theme area, two global questions were identified. The first one was how women’s economic entitlements can be ensured in a context of increasing pressure on scarce resources on the one hand, and processes of globalization and liberalization of markets on the other. The second question was what role civil society organisations can play in contesting failures of women’s economic rights.

The two stories on this theme can be found in Part II of this book:

- *Women Open the Debate on Access to Land: the case of the rural community of Enampore in Ziguinchor, Senegal*
- *Valuing the Socio-economic Rights of Women Producers of Shea Butter: a case of active citizenship by the women of Gampela in Burkina Faso*

### **What was achieved**

There were two projects addressing economic rights of women. The Comité Régional de Solidarité des Femmes pour la Paix en Casamance/USOFORAL (USOFORAL) in the Casamance, Senegal worked on improving women’s rights to land. Association Song-taab Yalgré (Songtaab-Yalgré), in Burkina Faso, focused on compensation rights for the economic losses of women producers of shea nut butter in the village of Gampela. Gampela has been affected by the construction of a ring road around Ouagadougou funded by the World Bank. Both the Senegal and Burkina Faso projects demonstrate ways through which civil society organisations can support women to develop and claim economic rights.<sup>12</sup> Both projects implied claims for recognition of women as producers and economic actors per se, as well as redistribution claims for compensation for the loss of land, access to natural resources and therefore income in the Songtaab-Yalgré project, and women’s improved access to land in the USOFORAL project. Both organisations had a history working with the women’s community groups in their respective project areas.

<sup>11</sup> A macro-economic policy which promotes free trade and open markets (no protection of national industry or agriculture), removal of state responsibility for pro-poor investment (like education and health) – adopted by international financial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank and a condition of provision of funds to global South countries.

<sup>12</sup> As indeed, did all the projects for rights more generally.



Fields with shea trees in Gampela, Burkina Faso Photo: Evelien Kamminga

In Gampela, Burkina Faso, the women's producer group had had divisions and conflicts which, added to the general low morale because of the loss of access to resources, had rendered the group inoperative. Songtaab-Yalgré helped to resolve this and rebuild a sense of common purpose and hope, through mediation, conflict resolution techniques and awareness building. Through institutional analyses followed by 'advocacy visits',<sup>13</sup> the project identified the state agencies responsible for compensation issues. They analysed the policies and mechanisms for compensation and found that in general they were unclear and ineffective, or not applied, and also totally gender blind.<sup>14</sup> They identified both the formal (statutory) rights to land and the mechanisms through which customary land rights were administered, as well as the procedures necessary to make secure (in statutory law) land which had been allocated to women through customary processes. During this process they developed a quantitative analysis documenting their losses as a basis for negotiating compensation. Finally, however, they came up against the barrier that the formal compensation allocation report by the agency responsible had already been finalized and passed to the government. Although the women had not then been aware of the implications of the new ring road, when the WAGIC project started it was already the case that compensation settlements would not take into account women's economic losses: neither direct loss of

<sup>13</sup> 'Visite de plaidoyage' in French, meaning a visit to someone to plead a cause.

<sup>14</sup> For example, the World Bank's own gender policy, limited though it may be, was not applied.

property (a centre for meeting, producing and storing shea nut butter – developed over many years, but without formal registered title); nor loss of customary gather-rights to shea nuts (or other natural resources) in the communal land and on cultivated farms; nor indirect losses (e.g. of the profits from selling shea nut butter or its use for subsistence).

However, their documentation and advocacy did result in: awareness among women of their economic rights and widespread recognition in the community of women's economic interests – and the value of their economic contribution to households and community. It has also led to awareness on the part of the sole woman councillor of her responsibility to defend and promote women's rights and interests and no longer be a passive observer in the (very male-dominated) council discussion, and to the commitment of the Mayor of Saaba Commune to include women in the elaboration of future development plans. Of concrete immediate benefit, the Chief of Gampela Village has allocated land to the women's group to rebuild their centre for processing and meeting (despite opposition from other customary authorities) and the Mayor offered support in having this land registered formally.

The women's group has been strengthened by these gains and increased awareness, voice and skills to negotiate and advocate, and also by the experience of documenting their economic losses. They are using all these to prepare for the public consultation, which the Minister of the Environment is mandated to hold to assure that all concerns have been addressed before construction starts. The Gampela women, with Songtaab-Yalgré, will further press their claim for full compensation rights from the state at this event. Thus claims on the state for full compensation have drawn some attention to the issue, but have not yet produced any material results from the state, although the process will continue. Although formal states have been regarded as more likely to support women's rights than customary and traditional authorities, this claim on the state agencies responsible for the women's displacement and losses has not (yet?) been successful, but the women's demands for recognition have resulted in (modest) resources allocated via the customary channel – in the form of another collective plot for the women's group.

The USOFORAL project in the Casamance worked on securing and widening women's rights to land in a context where women have in customary practice only use-rights to valley land, but not to the more productive plateau land. As a result of the long-standing conflict in this region,<sup>15</sup> women are frequently *de facto* household heads, since husbands and fathers have died, disappeared, joined the resistance [French: *maquis*], or migrated. Although allocating (relatively small) parcels of land to women's groups, including plateau land, has become accepted and rural councils do so routinely, individual women from those group cannot pass on their rights to that land (to, for example, their daughters), nor have they been secure in using the land of absent fathers or husbands. The initial research of the Women's Groups of the Community of Enampore [French: REFECE – *Regroupement de Femmes de l'Espace Communautaire d'Enampore*] and USOFORAL found not only that the Law on National Domain (in which women have rights to land) was not being imple-

<sup>15</sup> The decades long conflict in the Casamance region of Senegal between the Senegalese state and the Movement of Democratic Forces of the Casamance (MFDC), has often been described as 'a low level civil war.'

mented, but that even the rural council allocations of land to women's groups were not secure, because they were not registered. After finding this out, they immediately took steps to register their group land allocations. Their research also revealed that occasionally individual women have persuaded husbands to cede them land. Knowledge of this circulated discreetly amongst the women and the practice has been successfully implemented by others. Women explained men's occasional willingness to cede land as a new phenomenon and related it to the trend of households shifting from the 'two granary system' – one for a husband and one for a wife – whereby each spouse was responsible for a specific aspect of household subsistence, to a single granary system in which spouses have a shared responsibility. As a result of this shift, contributions to fulfilling household obligations can no longer be attributed to a specific spouse. Consequently, it is no longer so clearly a matter for men's prestige, if it is wives who contribute more to household provisioning (although this is not always so, as the case of Rosalie Manga in the USOFORAL case story in Part II shows).

At rural ward [French: *communauté rurale*] level, it is the elected rural councils that are formally responsible for administering and controlling land holding, including the responsibility to implement the Law of National Domain but this is generally disregarded in favour of customary practices.<sup>16</sup> The USOFORAL project therefore decided to start working on changing people's norms and beliefs so that they recognise how important, just and legal it is for women to have more equal land rights, drawing on statutory and constitutional law on the one hand, and customary law and culture on the other. Women paralegals, trained with assistance from RADI, another Senegalese organisation (which was also participating in the WAGIC programme and working on access to justice), facilitated focus group discussions through which women's, men's and youth awareness of and support for women's land rights was increased. They also made demands on the Rural Council to support women's claims to land under the Law of National Domain.

Simultaneously, their cultural research showed that, despite common reference to it, there is no 'fetish'<sup>17</sup> (taboo) [French: *fétiche*] which prohibits women from accessing land. The taboo that may exist holds land sacred and therefore something that cannot be sold, but in fact there is increasing commoditization of land and sales to 'outsiders,' including by customary authorities. Consequently the women concluded that, as custom is clearly subject to change, they needed to develop a strategy to influence change towards more rights for women. Using the language of need (especially of divorced, single and widowed women), benefit (to family and community), worth (women work hard) and injustice (discrimination against girls), they built support for improving women's access to land. Feeding back the research on fetishes, they initiated the concept of developing a local (customary) charter recognising women's rights to use, own and inherit land and to manage land allocation more equitably. This controversial idea has, through extensive mobilisation of multiple stakeholders as allies, subsequently gained enough support that all

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<sup>16</sup> Except where the state or powerful elites mobilise its provisions directly.

<sup>17</sup> In ethnographic terms, a fetish is an object believed to have or aid access to supernatural or spiritual powers. In many non-monotheistic beliefs these might be bones, carved objects, or animals thought to represent powers or spirits. In Christianity and Islam, examples might be prayer beads or symbols of the crucifix.

village chiefs have pledged to educate their communities to support women's access to land and a first draft of the charter has been written. Rather than simply rejecting 'culture,' the Enampore women researched and demystified cultural elements that were being used against them, and then re-appropriated these to support their rights. Thus they were able to 'discredit "cultural" excuses used to legitimize the disempowerment of women' and instead 'promote women's empowerment as a culturally legitimate, universally desired, and practically feasible goal.'<sup>18</sup>

Strategies	Actions in Burkina Faso	Actions in Senegal
<b>1 Enhancing recognition of women as economic producers</b>		
Making women visible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>quantify economic and social benefits for women from shea nut harvesting and sheabutter production and sales</li> <li>women use this evidence in meetings with duty bearers in different channels and institutions: state agencies, municipality (mayor) and customary leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>women collect information on the gap between national land laws and the reality of women in communities concerned</li> <li>women speak up about their land needs during public meetings</li> </ul>
Reclaim and redefine culture		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>investigate pertinence of 'fetish' of women using land that was believed should be used by men only</li> </ul>
<b>2 Claiming more just distribution of natural resources</b>		
Claiming compensation for loss of income and of infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explore possibilities for a claim with relevant ministries (3) and building company but find out that they are not formally eligible for compensation</li> <li>women identify spaces and means for awareness raising and influence: cultural and administrative events and the village council.</li> <li>build alliance with men</li> <li>submit a claim with local authorities, both customary and administrative</li> </ul>	
Claiming land for women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>claim land from the village customary authorities for women's group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop local customary charter which gives women land rights</li> </ul>

In summary, both projects have demonstrated that it is possible to enhance women's economic entitlements even in dynamic contexts of increasing pressure and competition on scarce resources on the one hand and processes of globalization and liberalization of markets on the other. Entitlements obtained so far may seem limited but they are significant for the local women involved, particularly if the expansion of their livelihood assets is

<sup>18</sup> See the Women Reclaiming and Redefining Culture Programme of the international solidarity network Women Living Under Muslim Laws and the Institute for Women's Empowerment at [www.wluml.org](http://www.wluml.org); [iwe-women.org/WRRC.php](http://iwe-women.org/WRRC.php); [www.violenceisnotourculture.org/node/902](http://www.violenceisnotourculture.org/node/902).

considered as well. Women have become better equipped to negotiate, to investigate what their formal and informal rights are and to use local political channels to defend their interests and rights. The role of the three civil society organisations in Burkina Faso and Senegal has been crucial in facilitating local women's contestation of failures of women's economic rights. Their role and experiences will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

# 3 Insights

## 3.1 Introduction

Reflection and drawing of lessons took place at different levels: at the level of each project as part and parcel of the action research methodology, and at the regional level when the WAGIC partners were meeting for peer exchange. The documentation or write shop at the end also focussed on jointly identifying the lessons learned from the process of women – in their own specific contexts – developing their own understanding and practice of inclusive citizenship and rights claiming. The insights gained are synthesized in this chapter.

## 3.2 Working through multiple institutional channels

Working through multiple and shifting institutional channels<sup>19</sup> has been of crucial importance for the results of the projects. The concept of utilizing different institutional channels and specific institutions strategically for rights claiming was introduced at an early stage to the participating organisations, when they were encouraged to make an institutional analysis of the rights failures and the responsible actors. A 'channels of contestation' matrix identifies institutional channels, such as the political, legal, policy, administrative, social and private sector, through which claims can be made. It also identifies the types of claim relating to each institutional domain, and the methods of citizen action used to make claims (Moser and Norton 2001). This notion of institutional channels was further integrated in the action research process and each project made its own analysis and strategic choices, often not once but several times.

A strength of the iterative nature of action research is its flexibility, which in the complex context of multiple levels of authority and rights regimes, was certainly tried and tested. The Songtaab-Yalgré project in Burkina Faso, for instance, had identified the national state land authorities as responsible for the road construction necessitating compensation. Having tried recourse there, and finding themselves blocked as a '*fait accompli*,' they turned to another channel of contestation – local 'traditional' land authorities, side by side with yet another, the local state administrative channel of the elected Mayor. They also intend to use the experience and outcomes of this project further to enter forestry and other policy channels in order to better secure women's entitlements to non-timber forest products.

The USOFORAL project in Senegal, also focussing on economic rights, likewise started with the state administrative channel, by formally registering existing land use. They then moved

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<sup>19</sup> The formal or informal mechanisms through which given (social, economic, political, cultural) ends are effected, with their specific rules and patterns of authority, influence and behaviours.



to kin channels and started negotiations with husbands and fathers. They ended by focussing on the customary system and trying to bring in new norms via working towards developing a local charter on land rights which would give women (and men) land entitlements.

The Alternative project in Niger on women's political participation identified gaps in the quota law on minimum levels of gender representation in political and nominated posts, and used existing mechanisms therein to enforce rights. In addition, they worked towards national law reform. Their focus was on the legal system and political channels, but they also worked through social and religious channels by raising debates about women's rights and political participation in different religious interpretations in their radio programmes and journal articles.

The FDH-DS project in Mali, also working on women's political rights, focused on different political channels by first building solidarity amongst women political activists (elected and non-elected), and establishing mechanisms amongst these women through which they amplified their power. They then entered the local party apparatuses and elected local government councils to claim better representation and more influence in decision making. They also strengthened the accountability of the women political activists to their constituencies.

Working on access to justice, the RADI-APROFES project in Senegal began by addressing dominant community norms, so that gender-based violence was increasingly recognised as serious and women and girls who had experienced it became able to speak publicly about it. They then focused on establishing or strengthening community committees and other mechanisms (of both women and men) to work on both prevention, and on supporting complainants in accessing redress in the formal legal system.

Acknowledging this diversity of institutional strategies and associated forms of citizen action leads to the (obvious) point that there can be no single recipe or blueprint for realising rights.

### **3.3 *'Speaking their "language" – that creates confidence': Longstanding relationship with the community***

In all but one of the project sites, the participating organisations had had long-standing experience and had built relationships of trust with either the community in general and/or the women in particular. The advantage of familiarity with and trust of not only the communities at large but also particularly with women as a disadvantaged social group is made clear by comparing the slower start in the Siby site with the Kati site in the Mali project. DEME SO had done some work in Siby before, but not directly with the women. Similarly, in the two projects which did not manage to complete – in Burkina Faso on forced marriage and in Niger on women's access to land – neither organisation had such a longstanding relationship with the particular community of their project.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Although it should be noted that both these projects also had other difficulties.



This is obviously not to imply that gender-inclusive citizenship can only be developed where NGOs have worked before, but to note that time and sustained effort are needed to build relationships and insight. Discussing this issue, the participating organisations noted that it enabled manoeuvring between a common understanding of the status quo, and/or possible objectives and pushing the boundaries. These boundaries had been, variously: modes of dress; interventions in changing discourses (especially religious discourses);<sup>21</sup> recognising expertise in women (and not only men), whether community members or NGO activists (Imam 1994). It also enabled the NGOs to assess where and how to be flexible in projects, and where persistence would pay off. Both of these were dependent on the women's and also wider community's assessment of the NGO's integrity and sincerity.

### 3.4 *'Now I have become a personality':* Autonomous identity, capacity and confidence

*'Now I have become a personality'* and similar statements were made by women in most projects, when asked what the project had meant to them.

The combination of women's active involvement in all stages, targeted capacity-building, and coaching by the NGOs, resulted in increased organisation and perceptible increases in women's individual (and group) rights awareness. They also became more confident in their own capacity to analyse, develop knowledge and act successfully, which contributed to the effectiveness of all the projects.

However, it took some time to build active participation across all the projects. This was often because, even for those organisations who described their approach as participatory, this initially often meant seeking and taking into account feedback and agreement from 'the community' but actually still defining issues, objectives and strategies for 'the community.' Active involvement, as community women themselves participating directly in setting the agenda and making the decisions about issues, strategies and objectives, is more difficult (and more time intensive) to achieve. On the other hand, it was also frequently the case that women were accustomed to depend on others (men, NGO activists) to define initiatives which they might (or might not) actively support. It sometimes took considerable 'pushing' by the NGO activists to result in women participating in taking decisions.

Two factors facilitated active participation. One was the sense of being part of a group and being able to speak for the group. Where women had not been organised as a group taking on the issue before (as in the Siby site of the Mali political participation project) or where their groups had had difficulties (as in the Burkina Faso compensation project) it was necessary for the participating organisations to first support them through the process

<sup>21</sup> Discourse is used here as a set of ways of giving meaning to and structuring given social practice. A discourse develops historically, based on who has the power to establish meanings (who gets to define what and in which circumstances). It may often be contested both from within (the community of those who broadly accept it) and from without. Discursive analysis would include oral and written communication, signs, symbols, gesture, and acts (see Imam 2003: 553).



Women researchers from Siby providing feedback to the larger group. Photo: Debbie Gray

of building, strengthening and re-orienting the purpose of the women's own community groups. This does not mean that there were no individual women who were confident and articulate about their individual or group aims (on the contrary, there were several in every project), but that the sense of group support, solidarity and legitimacy that women collectively felt very clearly facilitated their voice and agency.

In each project, the smaller group of women tasked with data collection or an advocacy action, for example, took responsibility to feed it back to the larger group for collective analysis and validation, so that it became not 'my' knowledge, but 'our knowledge' of 'we women.'

The second factor was the process of capacity building. All the women in all projects felt that they needed training in a variety of different areas, to which the participating organisations responded (see also the following Chapter and the case stories in Part II). This often gave the women access to new knowledge – the concept of citizenship, international and regional human rights conventions, rights in existing national laws, rights in religious discourses – as well as knowledge that other women in similar communities were also successfully addressing these issues. It also developed skills – such as formulation of research questions, interview techniques, analytical techniques, critical reflection, lobbying and advocacy techniques. Even for those women who already possessed some of this expertise or who, for example, obviously had practical experience in lobbying and advocacy, the formal training provided confidence in their knowledge and skills, as well as the opportunity to share them with other women.

However, capacity was also built in the practical process of actually researching, analysing, reflecting and strategizing themselves. The iterative cycle of action research, with the possibility to identify some new aspect or issue and repeat the cycle without the sense that one had failed or made a mistake, was instrumental to this. The triumph of having engaged in producing new insights, documenting their own economic worth, building on and developing ‘what we all know’ gave women enormous confidence to move on with rights claiming, with the groups perceiving themselves as a force to be reckoned with. For example, one NGO participant observed: *‘They feel themselves to be “a personality” because they have the status (power) to ask for information in their political parties. Also, they have become the experts because they know more than the others and they have begun to know their rights in the state system’* (FDH-DS project, Mali). Similarly, *‘The women researchers feel they are now “a personality” because they have the status of researchers and can go into other villages to ask questions on behalf of the group’* (USOFORAL project, Senegal).

### 3.5 ***‘Now they are engaged in questioning tradition’: Navigating between different rights regimes***

Each of the country contexts is characterized by sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory systems of rights (international human rights, national laws, dominant customary norms, dominant religious discourses) as well as different levels of structure (family/household, community, local government, national government). Recognising this, the projects used institutional analysis to identify where and how to intervene to get recognition for rights and ensure entitlements. In each project, this required manoeuvring between different rights regimes and, in effect, working on making them more progressive and consistent with each other in addressing women’s citizenship and rights.

In the Niger political rights project, that meant drawing largely on national law (the quota law) as well as, in their radio programmes, addressing women’s rights in Muslim discourses to engage in public and political life – but also on criticising contradictions in both state law and religious discourses. This was also the case for the political rights project of DEMESO-FDH in Mali.

In the Casamance region of Senegal, the USOFORAL project drew assurance from their introduction to human rights discourse to critique the customary rights regime in land. As one USOFORAL activist said: *‘Now they are engaged in questioning tradition ... it is the rights-based approach which reminds us of rights. ... The introduction of the dimension of formal rights made the difference to enable us to come out of the box of customary practice and have new arguments to change the situation.’* Thus the women introduced the idea of a local charter that will give women (and incidentally landless men) entitlements to more productive plateau land in allocations by customary authorities.

The APROFES-RADI project in Senegal similarly developed a new, fundamentally different, trajectory in informal mediation by traditional mediators, moving from the customary

objective of 'family peace' to, as a basic principle, including protecting the victims of violence, drawing on women's and girls' right to be free of violence.

The advocacy and claims in the Songtaab-Yalgré project in Burkina Faso, addressing compensation rights in national law, nonetheless found resonance in customary authorities, who recognised and acted to partially compensate the women's group for their losses with a land allocation.

Ironically, while drawing on human and national rights discourses, in three of the five projects, women were better able to secure claims through the customary rights authorities than through the secular, 'modern' state institutions, despite the latter being seen as more progressive than 'culture and tradition,' which are so often cited as an undifferentiated obstacle to women's rights.

### 3.6 Women 'never pose problems in terms of rights': Strategic use of arguments and language

While women drew legitimacy from rights discourses, the language they used in negotiation was very often couched in terms of need or morality, rather than rights claiming. Sometimes this is habit and a way to deal with the existing power relations. But it can also indicate a lack of clarity about rights claiming. Indeed one USOFORAL activist stated that the rights-based approach posed difficulties for the women in the Casamance. She described the community as 'horizontal' in which (prior to the WAGIC project), *'even if [women] do not understand the concept of citizenship, for example, they exercise it already, because they have always taken up the issues that challenge their communities. For example, in this area it is women themselves who put an end to the conflict.'*<sup>22</sup> She went on to explain, however, that the women *'never pose problems in terms of rights. Often they negotiate... Because if there are no negotiations, if women pose problems in terms of rights, it does not work.'* In this instance then, the non-use of rights language is a negotiating tactic. Through articulating a need and its satisfaction, the women turned it into an entitlement. Another USOFORAL activist described this as being able to critique tradition, 'shaking the system' – not by claiming rights directly but by speaking about needs that the current system is not catering for and claiming justice from the community as well as benefit to the community.

The process of securing rights first requires a consciousness of the right to have a right. It also requires knowing what are rights (in constitutional or national law, or in international human rights discourse or other rights regimes). But it also requires building a local culture in which those rights are recognised and therefore more likely to be respected. As Farida Shaheed et al (1998) point out, 'since the interpretation of law cannot be detached from the specific cultural context in which it is located, norms and accepted practices profoundly affect the application and the interpretation of law..' All the projects were extremely

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<sup>22</sup> In 2003 thousands of women organised and marched for peace, demanding of both the Senegalese government and the MFDC that they stop fighting. Shortly afterwards both sides agreed to a cease-fire and started negotiating.

clear about this and worked to intervene in dominant religious, ethnic-cultural, political discourses, engaging in the construction of a new hegemony (in the Gramscian sense of constructing a popular consensus rather than imposing a new totalitarianism).

In this process, the participating organisations all stressed the importance of understanding the community culture and context and ‘speaking the language,’ not only literally the spoken vernacular but also the context, habits and norms. An activist from FDH commented:

*I'm not saying that if you do not speak the language of the community you cannot work with them, but it still brings a familiarity. But in addition, it gives you a power to analyse. For example in Mali, we use many anecdotes. Sometimes women, instead of answering directly, they answer you with a proverb or an anecdote or worse they are silent. So you, as a stranger, when you come you do research like this, it will not be easy for you to decipher what women want. Because sometimes when they are silent, you insult them by going on... So it's important to understand, that is also part of culture, but the language is important.*

Another pointed out, for instance, that this would include knowing that to share meals is an important part of developing trust and relationships. Working with the tropes and idioms of popular culture was important, using popular songs or creating songs, for example. Referencing custom and culture in the development of the Casamance local charter in the USOFORAL project is an example of how this played out in one instance.

### **3.7 ‘Softly, softly catchy monkey’: Identifying and working with duty bearers and allies**

All the projects began with ‘conscientisation’ of women in the communities to deepen their awareness of the right to have rights. The process also drew attention to particular rights violations or failures and how these affect the women, as well as how barriers to realising particular rights could be removed. Hence, the groups spent considerable time analysing which specific institutions and individuals needed to be addressed to achieve their objectives; an analysis which worked at different levels with sometimes different rights regimes, and considered where there might be pressure points and leverage for contestation.

For instance, the Burkina Faso project had to do considerable research to find out which institutions were responsible for compensation for the land and other losses caused by the ring road project. They had to identify the authority and powers of each institution, and find out how to access them – some of these were state agencies operating under secular law, and some were customary authorities (recognised by the state, but using a customary rights regime). In doing so, they found that the institutions which were nominally the duty bearers (responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling rights) were frequently not violating them (although that happened also). A major problem for all was that rights were not clearly stated (defined or assigned to an institution to fulfil) and/or there were no mechanisms of accountability and enforcement, or these were inadequate. Thus in order to claim a right, it was necessary for women first to advocate for recognition of their

entitlement and then (re)distribution of resources, decision-making power, compensation etc. In the Burkina Faso case, this process turned out to be easier to achieve in the customary rights regime than in the formal state rights regime.

Public 'naming and shaming' of rights violations or non-fulfilment is perhaps the best known tactic for addressing institutional duty bearers (as exemplified by large Western based organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch). However, it is only one of a range of ways of addressing duty bearers, and the specific strategy must depend on contextual analysis of feasibility and efficacy. The clear preference in the WAGIC projects was for a 'softly, softly catchy monkey' approach that included: persuasion and advocacy (all the projects); suggesting policy (Niger quota law reform); capacity building (as in the training for informal mediators in the Senegalese project on accessing justice); addressing impunity (through letting duty bearers know that women are aware of their rights and were scrutinizing for fulfilment, as with local political parties and gender policies in the Mali project); and getting duty bearers to make public promises, to which they could be held accountable. On the one hand, given the general power differentials between women and duty bearers, less confrontational strategies might be preferred out of caution. On the other hand, there is also the view that 'honey attracts more flies than vinegar,' and a broad cultural inclination to indirect diplomacy rather than confrontation.

Nonetheless, the projects did not reject 'naming and shaming' out of hand. For example, while the Burkina Faso project was uncomfortable with the suggestion to embarrass the World Bank (and the government) by making public its non-implementation of its own gender policy in the Ouagadougou ring road project, by contrast in the Senegal access to justice project, the women chose to make a formal complaint and demonstrated in front of the Minister for Health against the closure of a health centre. Similarly in Niger, when making an informal complaint to the party officials did not work, women went to the tribunal to force one of the political parties to respect the quota law and recognise a woman's election as councillor. In the latter two projects, the women first tried the diplomatic route, and then used the direct action/confrontation route – successfully, in both cases.

Duty bearers are conventionally thought of as the state (or its agents) and the international community of states. However, recognition of other sorts of duty bearers, sometimes referred to as moral duty bearers, has also begun to emerge (e.g. Ljungman 2004; Kirkeman Boesen and Martin 2007). During the course of the projects, it became more and more evident that non-state duty bearers are extremely important for realising women's citizenship and human rights – including family heads, religious authorities, and customary title-holders. Advocating recognition of the full significance of these is important to develop a cultural context for the recognition of and respect for rights. Following Imam (2003): 'recognising that rights are defined as a product of struggle, when (certain) rights are not recognised or respected particularly by dominant groups, less pressure is brought to bear on institutions to fulfil their mandate..' Hence, in the access to justice project in Senegal, advocacy about women's right to be free from violence was then backed by training for informal mediators (senior family members and family heads, religious leaders, community chiefs) in respecting and protecting this right in their resolution of family and domestic conflict.



Mobilising allies to influence institutions was the other strategy that most of the projects adopted. During the course of the projects, participants began to distinguish more clearly between duty bearers (state and non-state) and allies. Duty bearers have an obligation to respect and protect rights, but allies became recognised as those specific individuals who share the same objectives and are willing to use their position and influence to achieve them. In other words, well-chosen allies are those who will increase women's power to influence. Although some duty bearers may become allies, others may themselves be violators of the rights they are mandated to protect and promote. Nonetheless, it can be extremely useful to seek out the individuals within duty-bearing institutions who are (or can become) allies. Allies may also simply be influential individuals within the community who have no formal responsibility, but are willing to bring what power they have to bear on respecting rights – the FDH-DS participants cited the example of Oumou Sangare (a well-known Malian singer), whose popular song '*Welewelewetou*' has a lyric which states 'if you send your daughter to an early marriage it means that you destroy her womanhood..'

The distinction between ally and duty bearer is important because mistaking someone for an ally, and approaching them, runs the risk of giving them information to use against one's objectives. USOFORAL had this experience with a chief who, suddenly grasping that the women were not asking for charity but demanding rights to land, was revealed as a fierce opponent. Consequently, they were obliged to rethink their analysis of allies and search for more reliable ones. This resulted in being able to influence the Chiefs' Council to support the development of the local charter.

Clarifying the roles of duty bearers and allies also helps reveal what demands can be made and where, and promotes accountability. The Alternative project's submission of the propositions on quota law revision to the Ministry of Women was made on the basis that it is an institution mandated to protect women's rights, and one that can address law makers more directly than civil society can. Similarly, when the community group in Senegal met with their councillors over violence against women and girls in Sud-Yeumbeul, they were clear that they were requiring councillors to address the issue as a responsibility of their position. Still, as honey attracts more flies than vinegar, the approach was typically persuasive, rather than confrontational, in order to 'convert' duty bearers into allies.

Alliance building was recognised as a process and a long-term strategy. Several factors were identified as necessary for successful alliance building. These included: evidence of commitment and integrity (such as a long-term support presence, rather than a short-term project approach); willingness to engage in dialogue, then moving on to 'push the frontiers' (such as identifying needs, and moving on to discuss rights to having those needs addressed); using familiar tropes, but questioning them so that they are framed differently (such as beginning with general religious verses requiring respect and dignity of the person, and discussing how that works for particular groups – such as women).

Nonetheless, the concern with alliance-building and working with duty bearers was based on working with the community of women (the group of rights-holders, identifying themselves as having citizenship rights). As one activist put it, '*When there is enough of*

*a visible change at the base, there will certainly be repercussions at other levels, which follow on.'* Hence, making demands on authorities came after working with women and youth to build wide support for women's land access (USOFORAL in the Casamance). Similarly, demands for women's increased representation in political processes (via quota or influence in the local council) came after widespread media awareness (Alternative in Niger) and solidarity building amongst women political activists (FDH-DS in Mali). In like fashion, meeting with councillors on measures for public safety in Sud-Yeumbeul was built on developing the voice of women and girls subjected to violence, and the solidarity of community organisations with them.

### **3.8 'No one is excluded or marginalized': Women's understanding of gender inclusive citizenship and rights**

During the programme, women developed a sense of 'empowered gender inclusive citizenship' and began to discuss these concepts – in their own languages as well as in French. In none of the languages of the communities are there direct translations and one-to-one correspondences for terms like citizenship, rights, democracy – and indeed, in any language these are multi-dimensional terms, subject to debate. What follows here then is only an indicative analysis of the oral discussions – a full analysis (for each language) remains to be done and would be a whole project in itself. However, even when people do not verbally articulate a discourse, analysis of their actions can show their understanding (and perhaps more clearly). So this section also looks at women's practice, as well as on reflections on that practice – both by the women themselves and by the participating organisations who worked with them.

Across the board, women developed a sense that citizenship and rights must include women without discrimination. In Wolof (Senegal) gender-inclusive citizenship was expressed as claiming rights and responsibilities for women, as for men – *'no one is excluded or marginalized.'* Similarly, in Bambara (Mali), human rights were discussed as the 'rights of the person' and citizenship as 'participating in public life,' which was distinguished from, and as more than, participating in politics. In both the Mali and Senegal projects, participating organisations noted that women were beginning to be more and more aware and to demand their rights to *'decide, or at least be represented in public social forums. I see that as really the quest for women's empowerment in community dynamics, whether in the household or at the level of managing the town's resources, or in the health committee'* (APROFES). It entails a shift in gender roles because women are entering public spaces (e.g. becoming members of health committees or party candidates for the election of local councils), that were in the past only available to men. In Senegal it was noted that women engaged in the project were using their enhanced capacity also to examine council budgets. In the FDH-DS project, a political activist formally registered her children and began a campaign to encourage other women to do so - in Mali, many children cannot access state benefits because they are not registered, but registration had almost always been undertaken (or neglected) by men. She was proud of her initiative and that she was taking on board the television slogan *'à nous la citoyenneté'* (citizenship is ours).



In Hausa (Niger), which is a gendered language, human rights is translated as ‘*Yancin ‘dan Adam*’ (literally, freedom of the son of Adam [human being]), while women’s rights are referred to as ‘*yancin mata*’ (literally, the freedom of women). Similarly, full citizenship is for ‘*dan kasar cikake*,’ (literally, ‘full son of the soil’). Thus gender-inclusive citizenship meant that women also claimed recognition as ‘*cikkaken ‘yan kasar*’ (full children of the country) and to have the same rights and treatment as men. On the basis of non-discrimination, one woman political activist, having fought and won first place on the party ballot list, refused to be relegated to third place simply because she was a woman – indeed she threatened to leave the party altogether and take her supporters with her, if her right to be placed first was not accorded. An Alternative participant commented that initially, ‘*women saw themselves as simply having the right to vote. To be a candidate and to be voted for... there is a level a bit higher there. It is one of the most outstanding results – that the women are confident!*’

However, this identity of human rights and citizenship with equality (i.e. sameness) of treatment with men apparently also meant that women in the Alternative project did not, for example, take on the fight for a free maternity clinic because ‘*ko maza ba su da shi*’ (Hausa – ‘even men do not have this’).<sup>23</sup> This was not the case elsewhere – in the RADI-APROFES project, for instance, the women did fight for a rural health clinic which had provided maternity and antenatal services for women.

In addition to embracing citizenship and the rights associated with it as necessarily including women, there was also the realisation that rural women should have equal rights as urban women (and men). This was particularly the case in Niger, where the project explicitly helped develop a sense of ownership of citizenship rights as not being only for urbanites in the capital city. Alternative chose to work in Zinder Region for the project, approximately 860 km from Niamey, the capital. There was, furthermore, pride in providing leadership from their region in a national struggle for women’s rights for the first time.

### 3.9 **‘One will no longer cry sitting down. Now, one will cry standing up’: Readiness to defend one’s rights**

As the WAGIC programme utilised a rights-based approach to development, the participating organisations reinforced and in some places introduced the concept of having rights, rather than requesting charity, and that rights can be claimed. A DEME SO participant from Mali commented that the notion of claiming was new and that the word – *kanyini* (Bambara) was used, which means ‘demanding’ rights. In the Casamance – as discussed above – there was both strength in knowing that they have rights, and difficulty separating the concept of having a right from the strategic language of negotiating (used to get the right fulfilled in practice).

<sup>23</sup> Or possibly, it was an estimate of the feasibility of achieving this objective. There are, it should be noted, Hausa speaking feminists in Niger who recognise both the specificity of women’s rights as a gender group, as well as rights to non-discrimination on the basis of gender.

Becoming more knowledgeable and aware of rights went hand in hand with feelings of empowerment and awareness of past and present injustices. In the Senegal access to justice project, women said, *'We are awake, no one can deceive us anymore.'* In Niger, they referred to the Hausa proverb, *'Ba a cin albasa da bakinmu'* (they will not eat onions with our mouths – meaning someone else has the juice and you are left with a bad smelling mouth only, i.e. that benefits that women should have are enjoyed by someone else) and more explicitly, *'no longer will someone use us to gain something (for themselves).'* More generally, there was a determination that, *'one will no longer cry sitting down. Now, one will cry standing up'* (i.e. on their feet, ready for action); *'no longer will they suffer in silence, they will act'* (Senegal access to justice project). One of the RADI participants reflected that the women have learnt about rights, understood their rights and are acting to claim them – they have understood: *'I am a citizen, I have rights.'*

The awareness of rights has also led to women's understanding that they can exert accountability for fulfilling those rights from duty bearers (see also Chapter 4.5). In the peri-urban site of the Senegal access to justice project, Sud-Yeumbul, the following change was observed by NGO staff:

*They make claims. They go and ask the duty bearers [French: mandataires] you have to account to us, because now we know our rights. There is a myth falling, to the extent that elected officials, mayors... used to be taken as little gods. Today in South-Yeumbeul, people, women, come before the mayor to speak to him. That's really saying we have put you in that seat there. So that means today if there is insecurity in the neighbourhood contributing to cases of violence (against women), you have to tell us, as an elected official, what you can do about it. And he (the mayor) said yes, I will fight against it...'*

### 3.10 **'It is both together': Rights and responsibilities as corollaries**

In all the projects there was a commonality in regarding having rights and the responsibility to one self and to society to make them real as corollaries – one cannot have a right without a responsibility. This was expressed in statements like the following:

- *'As a citizen I can claim, I can contribute to demand rights'* (Mali project);
- *'The ability to have rights and to take up responsibilities... the right to access justice also means the duty to go to the tribunal if the right is violated... It is both together'* (Senegal access to justice project);
- *'Citizenship has two parts – rights and ability to take responsibility'* (Senegal land project);
- *'With the concept of inclusive citizenship, they realise that they have not only rights, they have duties, and the notion of responsibility is also required'* (Burkina Faso project).

This sense of rights and responsibilities was not only individual but also collective. It was expressed in Wolof (Senegal) as *'yeewu yeti'* (to wake oneself and to wake others). In Mali, it was exemplified by the woman who began to mobilise other women to also register their

children's birth. Interestingly, it also resulted in better political representation in Burkina Faso (where the focus of the project was economic compensation not political participation) through a woman councillor in Gampela who realised, through participation in the project meetings, her responsibility to women as a group. She explained that she was no longer attending meetings of the council, the village committees and with the mayor '*en tant que figurante*' (as a walk on or extra in a theatre play), but was participating in them to defend women's interests and report back to women. Thus having rights, and the responsibility to secure them, was understood as both individual and of/for the community of rights-holders. Another example of solidarity among women as a group for a strategic objective, over and above individual interests, is from the Mali project. In this case, after one project meeting, realising that one woman candidate did not have any campaign t-shirts, another candidate – despite being from a different political party – organised for her to have some t-shirts also. Women politicians are frequently faced with having to choose between the party agenda and women's issues; in this case, she chose to prioritise women's representation in politics.

The understanding of responsibility in the projects did not imply a 'blaming the victim' syndrome. Rather, it encompassed a sense of agency – that women are empowered by having rights to play an active role in determining and defending them in their daily lives. They went on to elaborate that, '*they take their responsibility – facing their problems, facing the situations in which they live – to play a little role as actors in the processes of resolving the problems or in the development of their local communities*' (Burkina Faso project). Similarly, '*they take upon themselves the responsibility to say 'I have this right, and I am going to assert it'*' (Senegal access to justice project). Although not articulated as such, the women in the projects clearly understood that rights are a product of struggle; that is, that they must be active in order to concretise rights they have in principle.

### 3.11 '*No longer does someone go in our place, we go ourselves*': Developing voice and agency

Through all the projects, it was also clear that women had further developed confidence to express their own views, speak and act for themselves. In particular, women developed the assurance to speak even when men were present. RADl representatives explained this as follows: '*before, the women would say 'we are behind you'* [the men, or sometimes the NGO], *but now women don't say that anymore.*' Similarly: '*before, they let the men speak first and the women do not add anything. But now, they express themselves.*' The Mali project had a similar observation:

*If they were just women, they would talk, talk, talk. But when they got to a place where men are, they don't talk. They don't talk in front of men, they just keep quiet – they say they agree, even when it is not true. Now they don't do that. They speak up themselves and they say what they want. Before, we had a lot of difficulty getting women to speak – we had to ask them, provoke them. But now they speak and can even contradict and clarify in front of men.*

Women are not only speaking out more but also they dare to speak about sensitive issues, including issues perceived as unjust. One of the access to justice project facilitators illustrated this as follows: *'When we talked about sexual violence, at first it was difficult. But then they themselves started to speak about violences, how they lived it, and what they think can be done to solve it.'* At the start of the project, survivors were asked to provide testimonies and they later explained that this helped them a lot to overcome shame. One of the active women in the project said: *'now I can speak about rape, even in front of the Imam..'*

Women in the WAGIC programme are not only speaking, but gaining confidence to act for themselves and to enter the public sphere which used to be reserved for men. Rural, poor and non-literate women's groups often have a man who 'accompanies' them to deal with correspondence, and who is frequently the one to go to town to buy things, open accounts, deposit money etc. for them,<sup>24</sup> referred to in Wolof as *'groom botai.'* Through the projects, however, more and more, women said, *'no longer does someone go in our place, we go ourselves'; 'it is no longer the case [that we wait for men to do something for us], we go look for it ourselves.'*

In some of the project areas, it was also observed that women were more often participating in community management – kin associations, neighbourhood committees, school management committees and the like. This was explained by a RADI participant as follows:

*Because women now know about rights, they do not only take care of their children but also deal with cases of violence in the schools, via the anti-violence committees set up by the project. The women are there, not only as mothers to monitor their own children and see if they are studying or not. But they are there as citizens. So this is a first level of citizenship, in instances of local management.*

Similarly, in several of the project areas it was noted that women – as individuals and as groups – are being consulted more. This was so in the Niger project, as well as in the Casamance, Sud-Yeumbeul and Thioffack communities (all in Senegal). For example, the women of the Citizens' Alliance of Thioffack told APROFES, *'when something must be discussed in this neighbourhood, when a decision has to be taken, they call the leaders of the Alliance. Now people consult with us.'*

From the perspective of sustainability and spin-off effects of the WAGIC programme and the methodological approach used, it is significant that in several of the projects, through the understandings developed of gender-inclusive citizenship, rights and responsibilities, and through their confidence and increased capacity, the women and their community organisations are noted to be working increasingly as autonomous agents – with less dependence on their NGO partners and their resources. An exception was the Burkina Faso project, where the concepts of citizenship, rights-based approach, gender analysis, action research, and participation as including community women in deciding the definition of objectives and strategies were ALL new notions and ways of working.

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<sup>24</sup> Often acting in good faith. Quite frequently, they are young literate men wishing to support their women relatives. However, it is not unknown for such helpers to exercise much influence in the group, or, sadly, for women's cooperatives or micro-credit schemes to be cheated by their 'helpers.'

The participating organisations were delighted to observe, *'now they are taking things into their own hands.'* APROFES, for example, noted that the community organisations involved in the project are taking up cases of violence against women directly, and not just referring them to APROFES for support. In Niger, challenges to the marginalization of women in their parties were made without recourse to the project – although (wisely) project and Alternative intervention were called upon when wider support proved necessary to take the case to the tribunal. A RADI participant summed up, *'we have been going to Thioffack or South-Yeumbeul for more than fifteen years, but always the community was relying on us [RADI]... Now things are changing. They can claim rights without waiting for others to do it for them.'*

### 3.12 Constraints and challenges

Two major difficulties for all the projects were the burden on women's time and their poverty. As elsewhere in the world, the gender division of labour allocates the bulk of unremunerated social reproductive work to women. This includes not only domestic work (cooking, cleaning, often fetching water, firewood, gathering foodstuffs), and childcare, but also organising and participating in the essential social activities that bind communities together and provide support in times of hardship. This involves not only organising, cooking and cleaning up after festivals, religious ceremonies, marriages, naming ceremonies, and mourning, but also supporting households with sick and old people, for instance. This is in addition to any productive/income earning activity – farming, marketing, processing, or as employees in urban areas. Women have precious little autonomous time. Project work had to be organised around this, shifted to take account of harvest or planting seasons, and so on. Furthermore, as the projects were working largely with poor women, the transaction costs of participating were often quite high for them. There was much discussion of whether and /or how participants should be reimbursed costs (e.g. transport from a hamlet to a village/local town for a meeting), or compensated for time (e.g. participating in a workshop or an advocacy meeting, instead of processing goods for sale). On the one hand, these are real and practical constraints to women's participation. On the other hand there are equally real concerns over commitment and self-directed choices and activity (as opposed to what is sometimes referred to as 'rent a crowd' or 'professional trainees').

Identifying and working on different channels of contestation is not always simple; and working on different levels may require different resources and strategies. In particular, linking local community work was difficult – whether across local communities facing similar issues, and/or building synergies to regional and national levels. Some of the reasons for this were internal to the project – a relatively short implementation time of only two years and a relatively small amount of money for implementation. For instance, both the political participation project in Mali, and the access to justice project in Senegal deliberately worked with different communities as a means of spreading and supporting their issues. However, in Mali, a link to national efforts around women's political participation was not made. And whilst the access to justice project in Senegal was able to link to national

struggles against violence against women, and indeed global synergies through their participation in the World Social Forum (made easier by the fact that it was held in Senegal that year, with some activities actually in Kaolack, as well as in Dakar), this was enabled by prior links and other funding of the NGO partners. Another reason for difficulties was the external political context – the coup in Niger meant that the planned national advocacy campaign on the quota law could not take place, for example.

Deciding between focussing on a concrete problem or structural change is always a difficult issue, but action research methodology can be used to address both in an iterative process (see Chapter 1). We can see both applications in the WAGIC projects. In Burkina Faso, the women's producer group addressed the concrete problem of women losing their source of income due to the road construction. They managed to obtain a plot of land as a group as ad-hoc compensation for individual and group losses (including the investments made by Songtaab-Yalgré). If this is taken to another level within the Songtaab-Yalgré organisation and used as evidence to influence policy makers (e.g. the Ministries of Infrastructure and Forestry) the potential outcomes will be structural in terms of real entitlements for all women shea butter producers. Other producer groups have already shown interest in picking this up further. In the Casamance, Senegal, we saw that the women's group firstly assured collective ownership of the plot of land used by the group. Also, some women went immediately ahead and negotiated access to land with their husbands. In addition, the project worked on a more structural change in women's entitlements to land by working towards a local charter.

The time span of the action research projects was short (two years of implementation, preceded by one year of preparation) – too short to achieve huge outcomes in terms of women's entitlements. The fact that the projects had limited budgets seems to have been less of a constraint, but did mean that only one or two small local communities were the focus in the projects. The changes that were achieved in the lives of women, however, both those most immediately involved as local researchers and also the wider group of women in the community, have been significant and are expected to have spin-off effects in the future.

### **3.13 And the struggle continues...**

Clearly, the action research projects contributed to local women and their organisations and allies gaining agency and expertise in how to go about investigating and addressing injustices. They managed to win greater respect for women and acknowledgement of women as rights holders, not only within their own communities, but also within the targeted duty bearing institutions that are responsible for producing and reproducing inequalities and injustices. The organisations involved played not only a key role in facilitating the action research projects but also worked and continue to work shoulder to shoulder with local women in their search for citizenship and justice. In the next chapter we will go in more depth into the journey that the WAGIC partners took by participating in the WAGIC programme.

At this time of writing – more than a year after the formal end of the projects, women in the communities involved are continuing to work on improving their own position and that of other women.

In Niger, the woman who refused to be discriminated against on the ballot list was elected councillor in her local commune of Mirriah, then went on to be elected at the Department of Mirriah, and is now a councillor in the Zinder Regional Council. As the Vice-Chair of the Regional Council has been convicted for misappropriation of funds, she is now considering running for that position.

In the Casamance, women have started to register their land more. The work on the local charter for land is continuing, and it has been agreed that women (and men without plateau land) shall have the right to plateau land, conditional on its being put into use within three years.

In Thioffack, following the women's demonstration against the closing of the health centre, it has been reopened, and two women from the Citizen's Alliance have become members of the health management committee. The advocacy work of the women and men community activists goes on, with the result that no new cases of forced or early marriage have been reported and verbal insults to women (especially in front of their children) have diminished. The participants of the informal mediation capacity building workshops, along with other 'traditional' mediators, have addressed several cases with positive outcomes, such as: two cases of lack of maintenance by the husband (one including abandonment) resolved in which the husbands undertook to fulfil their responsibilities; and one case of domestic violence in which the perpetrator confessed his guilt to a panel of notables (one of which was his uncle).

At the national level in Senegal, RADI and APROFES convinced the Association of Women Lawyers to include reform of the penal code so that civil society organisations can be party to court proceedings in women's and human rights cases [French: *partie civile*, which means that they have *locus standi* to be in court]. They also started a campaign in favour of women's and girls' entitlement to free medical certificates in cases of physical and sexual violence. These activities are being reported back to the community groups to inform the advocacy and rights claiming work at that level. The committee is currently focusing on the establishment of a fund to support aid for women and girls subjected to violence.

The women who were in the WAGIC projects have managed to get more respect for their sexual, reproductive and productive work and the rights that come with those. In some cases, gender divisions in access to and control over resources and decision-making power have also been shaken up, and there are signs of more equitable distributions starting to take place. Importantly, the women continue to claim rights and manage to realise them. They have gained a sense of self-worth, identity, agency as citizens of their communities. In addition, the gender relations mediating their access to rights have started to shift more. Women are now, more than ever, entering public spaces and speaking up for themselves. They have gained knowledge and insights about their rights and skills for claiming them

through different institutional channels; experience of how to navigate between different rights regimes and ideologies and how to increase their influence by building reliable allies.<sup>25</sup> They continue to construct gender-inclusive citizenship.

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<sup>25</sup> For more information on citizens claiming space and entering new arenas see Cornwall and Coelho (2007); Gaventa and Barrett (2010); Gaventa (2006) and examples of women in search for citizenship in post-conflict: Castillejo (2008).



# 4 The journeys so far

## 4.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the action research process, how it was facilitated by the seven participating civil society organisations and what we all learned from it. The seven organisations decided to join the programme for different reasons. For some, it was an opportunity to continue with the struggles that they were already engaged in and wanted to become better at. Others wished to broaden their span of work and to learn to work in different ways. They considered the opportunities to work with a rights-based approach, to use action research methodology and to 'get better on gender' particularly attractive. In this chapter therefore, we describe and analyse the journeys of learning and change the participating organisations undertook, as facilitators of action research for gender inclusive citizenship.<sup>26</sup>

## 4.2 Getting started

What does 'promoting gender inclusive citizenship and women's rights outcomes' mean and where to begin? And what is participatory action research and how does that come in? These were the big themes addressed during the first regional WAGIC meeting, in which the conceptual and methodological frameworks were introduced. They were revisited and their understanding deepened throughout the programme (such as during progress meeting workshops, KIT staff field visits and through remote communication). KIT worked with the assumption that in order for civil society organisations to facilitate action research for gender inclusive citizenship and women's rights the following shifts needed to be encouraged (variously for different partners):

From using a charity or needs-based approach to a rights-based approach to development;  
From viewing gender as 'women' and women as instrumental for development, to gender as relationships defining both men and women and women as rights holders;  
From citizenship as a normative and static concept focusing on state-citizen relations to the notion of constructing citizenship in a particular political/economic/governance context, and also the notion of active citizenship whereby people start to claim rights;  
From regarding women as victims and vulnerable beings to women as agents of change and a focus on their aspirations, capabilities and actions (agency);  
From working 'for' women as an NGO to working 'with' women and becoming accountable to them;  
From doing conventional research to action research for social change and justice; and  
From linear project implementation processes to iterative processes and action learning cycles.

<sup>17</sup> Although the experiences are quite different, they can be compared to the outcomes of a previous OXFAM-NOVIB-KIT collaboration focussed on gender mainstreaming and organisational change (Mukhopadhyay, Steehouwer and Wong 2006).

Some of these shifts imply changes in knowledge and skills, others in ways of operating and positioning of the organisations and individuals. Many could even be considered transformational in nature because they required a fundamental change in development paradigm that the organisations worked with and in the theory of change and world view.

At the start of the programme, each organisation had a broad idea for their action research project, but these needed to be further focused and developed into more concrete project proposals. Several steps were taken to develop specific and realistic project proposals:

- Identification, together with community women, of a key issue of concern in relation to one of the theme areas of economic rights, political participation and access to justice;
- Formulation of the goal, objectives and preliminary activities. The goal needed to reflect a commitment to generating and using knowledge to empower the women concerned. The objectives needed to have implications for action to address practical problems while also transforming broader social structures. The chosen activities needed to be driven by local women as self-reflective collaborators in defining the problem and realising solutions;
- Formulation of the research question(s) concerned with rights; along the lines of 'how to support and engage local women in addressing rights violation X which they face in daily life';
- Identification of the institutional sites at which the project would be operating (including the governance systems and levels, and the relevant rights regimes).

Secondary sources were consulted when developing project ideas in order to benefit from other experiences and to be familiar with current thinking on the particular subject. It was not easy, though, to find sufficient relevant literature in French. KIT staff also assisted both on-site and remotely with the drafting of the proposals, which were discussed and peer reviewed during a regional workshop. Peer review and exchange became a much appreciated tool throughout the programme as it stimulated cross-country sharing and discussion and helped dissemination of knowledge, skills and experiences within the region.

The conceptual and analytical challenges presented by the required shifts in vision, understandings and ways of working remained throughout the project period. It was by working on these challenges that they were gradually resolved and participants grew in understanding and ownership of concepts. During the proposal development phase all participating organisations faced the following challenges:

- *Defining the key issue of concern in a specific manner and in a rights analysis.* Initially, the problems were identified in too general and broad terms, such as 'poor access to land.' In addition, in the initial analyses, the chosen issues were mostly framed as causing or contributing 'factors,' rather than in terms of rights failures, actors and institutions.
- *Incorporating the concept of 'citizenship.'* Citizenship was initially mainly understood in civic education terms as the 'rights and duties of a state citizen.' The notions of citizenship being i) context specific and ii) related to different forms of belonging (community, district, state) and different rights, were not immediately taken up.

- *Difference between participatory action research and conventional research.* While participants were somewhat familiar with conventional research, participatory action research was new. It is not just describing the ‘what’ but trying to answer the questions ‘what should be’ and ‘how “we” can get to what should be.’ Initially, ‘participation’ was seen as consulting women or getting women to agree with pre-determined ideas rather than involving women from the start and facilitating them to take ‘the driver’s seat.’
- *The changing role of the organisation and the relationship with the women concerned.* The role of women in action research is not just to provide information but to become actors and ‘self-reflective collaborators.’ The expected role of the organisation to facilitate and work on a more equal footing with women in the communities than some were used to, required some adjusting by the NGOs. The action research project in fact also required not only political engagement but also positioning themselves in support of the women concerned rather than ‘telling them what to do.’
- *‘Action’ in the context of action research and rights-based approaches.* Much clarification was also needed around the principles and application of a rights-based approach, especially the difference between formal rights and every day rights’ experience – which require rights claiming, different channels of contestation, enhancing voice and working on entitlements and accountability interfaces [French: *action en revendication de droits*].

The process of project proposal development took almost a year. Although longer than anticipated, this process was very useful. This phase was crucial for the personal and organisational capacity development process as it entailed various sorts of analysis exercises: gender, rights and institutional analysis. It involved thinking through discourses that are often rhetorically stated such as ‘culture keeps women from participating in politics.’ It also required a mind shift from starting from, for example, ‘women are poor’ to women’s economic rights are violated and what that means in practical terms.

Each project built their diverse specific strategies on a similar contextual analysis. They looked at the nature of the right in question from different perspectives in their chosen site of action: global and regional human rights conventions; national, constitutional and statutory laws; dominant (global and local) religious discourses; and customary laws, norms and practices. Each project also analysed the institutions in their given contexts that were responsible for the status quo and/or the realisation of rights, identifying the ‘violators’ and ‘duty bearers.’

Each project also assessed what capacities needed to be built or strengthened to enable the partners (i.e. both NGO activists<sup>27</sup> and community women<sup>28</sup>) to effectively implement the various elements of the action research process, and their chosen strategies for action. In addition, the iterative spiral characteristic of action research (explained in Chapter 1.3) meant that it was not considered a failure to go back and do more research, and adapt and change plans as difficulties arose: all the projects did this and they were encouraged to do so.

<sup>27</sup> See the section on NGO capacity building below in this chapter.

<sup>28</sup> See the preceding chapter on building women’s capacity and confidence.

### 4.3 On the road

Unlike more conventional linear development projects, approaches to project implementation needed to accommodate the iterative nature of the action research process. For example, planned strategies and activities were not carved in stone and could be adapted when considered necessary. Work plans were established and reviewed on a six-monthly basis, as opposed to the usual annual cycle, to allow for changes in direction as circumstances changed.

Reflection was an integral part of the project implementation, with each NGO creating its own cyclical process of questioning, action, questioning and more action and working at its own pace. Documentation was critical, in order to help NGOs situate themselves within their respective processes, and was an on-going activity.

Although each NGO made its own journey, there were some common elements which are discussed next.

#### ***Participating organisations informing their networks***

The first step that the organisations took was informing their networks, consisting of other civil organisations, government organisations and individuals, about the new action research project. These contacts were generally already working on the same theme and could potentially play a role in the achievement of the objectives. Also, officials were invited who could give their formal approval to the initiative. This happened through meetings of various sorts or through an announcement during, for example, a district level meeting to which civil society organisations were invited to share their work not only for the authorities to be kept informed but also to stimulate exchange and collaboration between all stakeholders.

The participating organisations took great care that their networks were kept informed throughout the whole implementation process. The feedback meetings [French: *restitution*] that they organised were also utilised to validate and disseminate study results. The level of involvement of local women who took part in the action research during these events varied a great deal from one organisation to another but generally increased over time and became one of the spaces where women could gain visibility for their concerns.

#### ***Exploratory study***

The next step was to prepare and undertake a study to understand the key issue of concern more fully in all its dimensions, to focus project ideas, and to find entry points for further action. At this stage NGO staff members used data collection methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, collection of life stories and secondary source searches (laws, policies, grey literature).

The role of KIT at this stage was to provide technical assistance on request and to emphasise the importance of choosing and applying sound data collection methods, for which training was provided. The training also emphasised the importance of going beyond the often well-known constraining 'factors' (e.g. cultural prejudices; women not being allowed in

public spaces) to more clearly specifying the problem through identifying particular actors and institutions (e.g. biased police officers; Ministry responsible for road construction) and also the duty bearers and institutions (which were not always the same).

The **FDH/DEME SO** team undertook a series of interviews about the constraints on and opportunities for women to become elected in local government. They found that political parties formed a major barrier to women's representation and effective influence on decision making in local councils and municipal offices, and that this needed more in-depth investigation.

**Alternative** invited a group of six women and five men from their own network in Zinder Region, who had already been involved in the elaboration of the proposal, to undertake a first investigation about the reasons why the 10% quota is not met in certain districts [French: cercles]; possibilities to contest and correct the violation of the law; and why women are better represented in some areas than others. Through these questions the whole process of the quota policy was scrutinized: its definition and formulation, its interpretation and its implementation. The main conclusion was that there is a serious flaw in the formulation of the law that needed to be addressed. The project therefore focused on contributing to changing the quota law.

**USOFORAL** worked from the beginning with a smaller group of active women from the rural community Enampore with whom they had worked in the past and a relationship of trust already existed. The USOFORAL staff involved them immediately as equal partners in all activities, including data collection, while slowly building up their data collection and analysis skills. The community women researchers discovered through a study of documents at the district bureau for land registration that only men are registered as individual landowners. They realised the unfairness of women only having access to land on a usufruct basis through their social relations or collectively through the women's gardening group. A Venn Diagram exercise showed that in customary practice land belongs to local families and that they have the authority to decide what to do with it, rather than the local government or state. This was seen as a window of opportunity to work for women's land rights at community level.

The **RADI/APROFES** team confirmed through interviews in their two sites in Dakar and Kaolack that sexual violence in marriage is not recognised as a crime and that women suffering violence from husbands (physical and/or sexual) [French: 'violence conjugale'] usually only resort to informal mediation by family, customary and/or religious leaders, who usually do not apply statutory law or women's human rights norms. Women feel that they do not always get fair treatment. Sexual violence against girls, however, is recognised a crime and considered a case for the police and courts. The formal channel, while perceived as fair, is too expensive, complex and takes a long time. RADI/APROFES decided to focus on the quality of informal mediation mechanisms and on making the formal channel more accessible by supporting a campaign for allowing civil society as third party in court and for the provision of free medical certificates by state doctors.

The **Songtaab-Yalgré** team decided to focus on three aspects of the problem that they had chosen, the lack of recognition and compensation that shea butter producing women in Gampela community were receiving from land expropriation due to road construction. They started by studying the relevant policy documents and holding interviews with state institutions and found that in cases of urban expansion (infrastructure and housing), rural people's rights in general are poorly defined and a bias exists towards compensation for land being used for cultivation and tree planting. Gathering and processing of shea nuts by women was not recognised as a productive activity that also deserves compensation. They found that peri-urban areas fell within different partially overlapping and sometimes conflicting rights regimes. Rules for compensation of land taken by the state were not clear cut and are interpreted differently in each case. They saw this as a possible window of opportunity.

Through institutional analysis, **Songtaab-Yalgré** staff also found out that a whole range of state and local institutions were involved, and that each had its own mandate, perspective and level of negotiation power. People interviewed reported a lack of transparency in the implementation of compensation rules, where much happened through negotiation and was ad hoc. The advice of consultants usually reflected the standards set by the donor (the World Bank) but this advice was usually not (completely) followed. In this case, the World Bank did not follow its own recom-

mentations, by not taking account of women's economic production for compensation. In other words, potential rights claiming had to focus on several institutions.

Songtaab-Yalgré staff came to the realisation that Gampela shea butter producers have been invisible in the expropriation process so far. In fact, the association, as a whole or as individual members, had not been involved in the community meetings that were held, and therefore had not been using available spaces or channels to voice their particular needs and interests.

Songtaab-Yalgré also found out that shea butter production is not formally recognised as a form of land use in the various policies at stake, and that the women and thus their interests had been ignored in the process. They therefore decided that the best way ahead was to strengthen the shea butter producers organisation and build evidence around the economic and social losses encountered by the women in order to support claims.

In summary, the results of these initial exploratory studies provided many new insights to the problems that the participating organisations had chosen to work on. An important value of this stage was also that the NGO staff – who for the most part had no or limited research background and experience – practiced study design, selected appropriate methods and tools (e.g. interviews, focus group discussion, participatory observation, and secondary resources), collected information, and gained confidence in doing so. Subsequent analysis and critical reflection showed that the information was not yet adequate for developing concrete action. A major reason was that the actors and institutions behind the 'factors' were not well identified at this point. But perhaps the most important insight was the need to more explicitly involve local women as subjects in the action research project.

### ***Information sharing, capacity building and mobilisation***

After the first round study and the conclusion that effort was needed to involve women from the communities more fully, the seven participating organisations began to organise information sharing and/or validation meetings and also capacity building activities at the request of the community women. These activities were aimed at raising awareness around the topic of the action research project, enhancing the notion of citizenship, rights and justice, and subsequently mobilising women to become more actively involved in the project.

Different approaches and methods were utilised for information sharing – public information meetings, civic education sessions and radio announcements – to convey a number of messages. Messages included building community women's understanding of the formal rights that they have as citizens, and of the possibilities for taking action to improve the situation. Although the form and content of the capacity building activities varied a great deal, there were some common elements that included the following:

- Introduction to basic gender concepts and gender analysis
- Human rights and women's rights
- Rights-based approach to development
- The role of institutions in both rights violations and realisation of rights
- Formal and informal citizenship ('rights and duties')
- Characteristics and purpose of action research
- Introduction to the topic of the action research project

When introducing the topic of the action research project, the major research questions were also explained. For the preparation of the training sessions, NGO staff drew from materials that they had developed before and also from the materials used during the various WAGIC meetings. Translation of the concepts into local languages (Bambara, Dioula, Wolof, Mossi, Hausa) posed considerable challenges and this was often a topic of discussion during the WAGIC meetings, as discussed in Chapter 3.

One of the strategies used in these trainings sessions was the unpacking of existing narratives and discourses. Femmes et Droits Humaines/DEME SO, for example, engaged an expert in Muslim laws to question the popular notion that *'the Qu'ran does not allow women to engage in politics.'* He helped to demonstrate that this is a matter of interpretation of the Qu'ran and that other Muslims have a very different understanding, through which they encourage women's political participation rather than undermine it.

Another strategy was to use capacity building sessions as ways to broaden the support base for the project. Most partners therefore invited not only local women but also various stakeholders, such as powerful actors (e.g. certain customary leaders, politicians, NGO staff) who were either already considered 'allies' and therefore provided momentum to the projects, or had the potential to become allies.

A third strategy was mobilisation. Here the organisations used different approaches. Alternative, FDH/DEME SO, RADI/APROFES had easy access to community radio which was very beneficial for their WAGIC mobilisation activities. They used the radio, for example, to enable local women researchers to discuss how they had become active in local politics and what forms of discrimination they had experienced. USOFORAL and APROFES used their capacity to raise awareness through community theatre to support their WAGIC project.

FDH/DEME SO used not only community radio to mobilise, but also organised an exchange visit between women in the two different sites that they worked in. For the exchange visit, about 50 women from the rural community, Siby, went for a day to the urban community of Kati, where women had a longer history and more practical experience with politics. The group consisted of women leaders, female teachers, women working for civil society organisations, women already active in local politics, or aspiring to do so, as well as members nominated from political parties. Women from Kati provided testimonies of their positive and negative experiences with local politics. Some wanted to stand for election but did not get the opportunity. Others had been candidates but were side-lined, while a couple were elected councillors. Through these activities, women started to become aware of their right to have rights and the unfairness of certain rights being denied to them. They started to develop their individual and group identities as informed citizens, feel solidarity among themselves and were motivated to take action. The action research project was then seen as an opportunity to make change happen.

After these general awareness raising and mobilisation activities, participating organisations decided to form a smaller group of women in each of their sites/communities to become more actively involved in the action research project as researchers. This was done in

different ways. FDH and DEME SO invited seven women in each site, who were known for their active role in local politics, either as elected councillors or as past or future candidates for the local government council, to join the research group. USOFORAL drew from the existing network of women volunteers whom they had trained and worked with for many years. They set up a project committee consisting of USOFORAL staff members and women from this network who were motivated and literate. Alternative and RADI/APROFES also drew from their existing networks of women leaders and community volunteers who formed core groups for the two project sites, Yeumbul Sud and Thioffack.

Songtaab-Yalgré followed a different process. From the start they focused on the whole women's producer group in Gampela. The group was not very active and there were unsolved management problems. They therefore decided to engage the village chief to help solve a conflict around the lack of transparency in the management of funds. They also held a training session with the women to discuss the principles of a well-functioning association and discuss what was going well and what was not. A main topic was the responsibility that should be expected from members and leaders. In another meeting, members selected new leaders who would also be able to represent the group in the outside world. In addition, they selected a number of women to represent them in the action research activities. This whole process was in fact a practical lesson in practicing 'citizenship' for all members.

### ***Supporting community women researchers and activists***

By this time, each project had its own dynamics and was ready to fully engage community women in the action research process. These individual action research processes were automatically and by definition influenced by the specific social, economic and political contexts of each site and of course by the interests, motivation and capacity of all the actors involved.

The next step was preparing the selected women researchers for their task by introducing in more depth the content of the action research and the key research questions. Key concepts were also discussed in more detail and then applied, for example to the women's own role and responsibilities as community researchers *vis-à-vis* the larger group and women in their communities in general. NGO staff also shared the outcomes of the first round studies, facilitated joint reflection in relation to the original research questions and on how to proceed from here. Together they now formed the 'action research team.'

Following joint analysis and reflection sessions, the participating organisations further assisted community researchers to decide on their next steps to get closer to the goal of their project. If more information was needed, another data collection activity was developed. If sufficient information was available on the various aspects of the problem – especially the formal legal and customary aspects; the main actors and institutions causing the problem; the actors and institutions responsible for providing the entitlements – then discussions started to focus on strategies for change and finding concrete entry points for rights claiming and how to translate that into action. While the organisations were all to some extent taking part in the action themselves, they were also building the capacity of community women in creating and claiming spaces to articulate their needs and rights autonomously. The content and the rights claiming, negotiation and advocacy strategies



The **FDH/DEME SO** team subsequently decided to investigate more specifically what differences exist between the national policy and party regulations and the reality of women being excluded from various lists, meetings etc. So each woman went to her own party in an attempt to obtain the relevant documents. Some parties refused to provide the information or provided it after much delay. The women reported a lot of resistance in getting the documents and were surprised about the lack of knowledge of these documents among their party colleagues. The collective analysis of the documents made the women aware of the formal basis of their own sense of injustice. As mentioned in Chapter 3, coming from a different party background and working together on the same issue of discrimination created a bond between the women personally and as women that had never existed before and which surpassed party boundaries.

The **Songtaab-Yalgré** team (a combination of staff and local women) decided to then collect quantitative and qualitative information on the economic and social losses that the shea butter producing women encountered individually and as an association due to the loss of their economic activity from the road construction, and quantified these losses. This exercise, and the information generated, inspired the team because it contributed to their recognition as income producers and provided clear arguments for claiming compensation at different levels.

and activities were usually prepared together, sometimes with the help of external resource people.

The participating organisations also contributed by establishing linkages with strategic actors and institutions outside the community, who share a similar vision. This resulted in strengthening existing strategic alliances, coalitions and networks or establishing new ones. RADI, APROFES and FDH were already strongly involved in the struggle for greater access to justice for women and women's political participation respectively, and had established networks and alliances. Alternative, USOFORAL, Songtaab-Yalgré and DEME SO were relatively new in the field of their action research and had to develop new relationships. Particularly Alternative was successful in doing so, and moved from being a relative outsider to the women's movement to becoming a key actor in the movement and the coordinator of the national platform for the amendment of the quota-law. RADI and APROFES fed the information collected through WAGIC into the national campaign of which they were already part to establish the right of civil society organisations to act as third party in court, in order to be able to better support female survivors of violence, and also for the campaign for the right of sufferers of domestic violence to free medical certificates.

The more advanced the action research processes became, the greater the differences between them, even between projects working in the same theme area. Both the cyclical and iterative nature of the action research processes and also the different social, cultural and political contexts contributed to this. In the perception of the NGO participants (like the community women), the journeys have not ended with the formal ending of the WAGIC programme.

#### 4.4 Linking and learning at regional level

Although absorbed in their individual journeys, the participating organisations had plenty of opportunity to link with and learn from each other, and this was also one of the key strategies of the WAGIC programme. This regional component was highly appreciated

and considered crucial for the outcomes of their action research project, as well as for the personal learning of NGO representatives and the learning of their organisations as a whole.

The six-monthly programme meetings were instrumental in this respect and the sharing and peer reviewing process during these meetings resulted in much cross fertilization, mutual support and also new forms of exchange and collaboration. Some examples include: RADI trained paralegals working for USOFORAL; APROFES provided gender and popular theatre training to USOFORAL; USOFORAL provided advice to Songtaab-Yalgré on conflict mediation, and so on. In addition, partnerships were formed and new projects were developed together.

Several participants were already members of international women's networks (e.g. the international solidarity network Women Living under Muslim Laws (WLUML); the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID); the World Social Forum before they joined the programme. Others became active during the programme because their confidence and engagement for women's rights increased, for example stimulating them to become active in the African Feminist Forum. RADI and DEME SO went to a conference on access to justice in Sub-Saharan Africa organised by KIT in Johannesburg. FDH, RADI, APROFES, Alternative and USOFORAL went to the 2010 AWID International Forum and/or World Social Forum held in Senegal in 2011. They gave presentations on their action research projects during these events and contributed to the dissemination of results and lessons learned. By discussing their action research processes and outcomes with peers in different contexts they tested the 'dialogic validity' or soundness of their action research projects as referred to in section 1.3. One could say that WAGIC contributed to NGO participants becoming regional and global citizens and building international solidarity among women.

## 4.5 What was taken home

As stated in Chapter 3, changes that were initiated at community level have continued after the formal ending of the programme. The same can be said about the changes achieved at the level of the partner organisations. The major learnings from doing action research for NGO participants are described next.

### *Engaging community women as active citizens and rights holders*

*'We still have confidence in you, but now we also have confidence in ourselves and we can make things happen,'* said a community women researcher in the Casamance to one of the USOFORAL facilitators towards the end of the project.

By far the most important learning for NGO participants was that rights-based participatory action research has such a large potential for the women concerned to be actively involved in social change. Many had never seen such levels of engagement. They were surprised and pleased that community women (and men) would not only actually identify problems and injustices they wanted to change, but also develop their own knowledge

and skills and address the problems themselves. This is very much in contrast to conventional development projects that depend on external 'experts' to solve problems for them. There was also the insight that these activities have obvious affinities with exercising citizenship, and that action research as a methodology creates particular opportunities for women to engage and practice as citizens who are aware that they have rights and work to make them real. A concrete example often cited was the exercise of the responsibilities delegated to women researchers *vis-à-vis* the women in their communities. Women researchers were expected to provide regular feedback to the other women in their communities and engage them in collective discussion and reflection. This contributed to a sense of responsibility and also solidarity among the women as rights holders.

Another important insight for the NGO participants was that the relationship between them and their organisations on the one hand and community women on the other had changed fundamentally as a result of the participatory action research. They had become more equal partners, who work together, shoulder to shoulder, for rights and justice for women.

### ***Working with institutions***

Another major learning point for participants was the importance of consciously working with institutions and of analysing these. Learning to undertake analysis of the institutions responsible for causing a rights failure and for fulfilling the right was considered very useful – especially the strategic importance of identifying and engaging with duty bearers and their organisations at different and often interconnected levels, e.g. household, community, local government, national government. Also, working within and between different rights regimes was considered an important added dimension to their current and future work, as was the case for RADI/APROFES when they worked with both formal and informal mediation, described in Chapter 3.

RADI/APROFES and women researchers came to realise that the outcomes of informal mediation in cases of sexual or physical violence were not taking women's rights into account and that mediation was basically used to negotiate 'peace' and maintain social cohesion. They therefore decided to provide skills training to informal mediators (religious and customary leaders) and also introduce the notion of applying (human) rights as a standard. The next step planned was to develop an accountability mechanism whereby community level anti-violence committees will effectively monitor the fairness of the outcomes of mediation.

A challenge for the participating organisations and community women was dealing with the power differentials between them and their 'allies,' and distinguishing between allies and duty bearers in theory and practice. A duty bearer who turns into an ally in the struggle not only fulfils his or her duty and mandate, but is also likely to work on pressuring other duty bearers. It is important to know how much to count on someone as an ally, as USOFORAL found (see Chapter 3).

### ***Awareness raising and capacity building***

NGO participants also concluded that awareness raising and capacity building activities were essential components of their participatory action research process. The conclusion was not only that these were necessary, but also that there is a big demand for them and they

are concrete inputs that NGOs can offer. First, there was awareness raising of local women needed to get them on board and provide support to the women researchers representing them. Then there was training of the researchers in a range of technical skills, and also to establish a notion of what representation and accountability mean, which in fact involved exercising citizenship at the smallest scale. And finally, during the process of the on-going action research, specific training needs emerged that needed to be addressed. For example, when reaching the stage of taking action, there was a need for training in advocacy skills.

### ***Working in a flexible and iterative manner***

For the participants it was a major learning that a development project based on participatory action research can be very effective in terms of achieving social change, but operates in a very different manner than conventional projects.

*We were able to go back and forth and therefore analyse the quota law at several different levels of potential, non-implementation and insufficiency (formulation, interpretation and implementation). The women involved could both use and critique the collection of information and its analysis. (Alternative)*

Partners valued the participatory action research as a process of 'learning by doing' that, like citizenship, is not just an end goal in itself but a process of open-ended learning. The working image of a spiral helped to build a good process because it incorporated explicit moments of questioning – research – analysis/reflection – action – reflection etc.

Unlike conventional development projects, this kind of project does not present itself in predefined neat steps with pre-given ends and therefore cannot easily be fitted into log-frames. It was therefore much appreciated that progress reports (and documentation) offered explicit space to explain what the effects of changing political circumstances or new realisations had been, and the consequences for project strategies and activities. During the project, Niger experienced several coups d'état and Burkina went through a period of strikes and mutiny [French: *grèves, mutineries*]. Agreement existed that this kind of project requires an adaptive project management style, both from the implementing civil society organisation and from KIT.

### ***Sustainable and replicable results with multiplier effects***

*'Without us the process will continue; the women will continually gather information, analyse and act on it.'* (Alternative staff at final meeting)

*'Once women have mastered and own the tools they can apply them to any situation. They don't have to take things for granted anymore; they can investigate, inform themselves and ask critical questions.'* (Alternative staff at final meeting)

*'Women now make better use of radio space provided to them.'* (Alternative and FDH at final meeting)

*'In South-Yeumbeul and Thioffack, women speak out more and more about the problem of sexual violence. In Thioffack, women have even protested against the closure of the health centre during the visit of the Minister of Health.'* (RADI APROFES staff at final meeting)

Although the process was considered time-consuming, partners were convinced that the results are more sustainable and solid than from many other projects. They also realised that participatory action research is more than a project; that it is a (political) commitment.

The potential for replication and up-scaling was considered high and several organisations have already taken this up. Songtaab-Yalgré has been asked by nine other women's groups to support them in strengthening their negotiation power and ability to defend their interests. FDH started to apply the lessons it learned in a youth project. RADI, Alternative and DEME SO are already engaged in a new regional action research programme on women's access to land in their respective countries, funded by the EC.

### ***The changing position and role of participating organisations***

*You cannot take back what you have given to somebody. WAGIC has brought a lot of knowledge. We can now consider our target groups as at the same level as we are. The women are aware of that. They learn something from us, but we also learn something from them. The trust between us has increased and also the trust in themselves, and that is extraordinary. That allows us to do the same in other areas. (USOFORAL at final meeting)*

All partners experienced a change in their roles and relationships with women in their urban or rural constituencies. There was an increased awareness of the role and also the responsibility of the participating civil society organisations vis-à-vis local women as rights holders. Generally, the relationship between the organisation and local women has become more equitable.

*Initially RADI was expected to 'fix' everything for them. Then at the early stages of the action research project, people relied on us for information, capacity-building, support in trying out the new models of acting. Later women became more autonomous and able to do things themselves. We then moved forward as partners and had a more equal relationship. The women started to take decisions for themselves and ask our support for their initiatives, as partners and allies. (RADI at final meeting)*

There was also a sense that, due to the substantive participation of women, the 'workload' becomes shared between the community and the organisation. Generally, it was believed that the changes contributed positively to NGOs' legitimacy as civil society organisations.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

*We learned to train local women to do action research, which means not only data collection tools but also to do an institutional analysis and find out who the powerful actors are. Local women researchers feel responsible and valued. They are empowered to find things out, question issues and start debates on sensitive issues such as access to land. (USOFORAL in the Casamance, Senegal)*

We can conclude that the key elements presented and analysed in this chapter were critically important for each of the projects. The topics and research questions were diverse, but they all dealt with the question of how organise and engage local women, with the support of civil society organisations, in addressing specific rights violations that they face

in daily life. Another commonality was that the WAGIC partners implicitly or explicitly applied a similar theory of change, which was a hybrid of what they did before and what they learned through the WAGIC programme. The theory applied was that rights failures can, to certain extent, be addressed by building the capacities of both rights holders and duty bearers and thus overcome the cultural barriers that are causing the problem (e.g. women not entering public spaces; bad attitudes and destructive behaviour, including physical violence; underestimation of women's productive role). Filling the gaps in knowledge of women's rights as human rights and of the specific law/policies in relation to the topic is still considered essential but no longer sufficient for change.

Another shared strategy was mobilising women as citizens who are aware that they have rights and responsibilities to improve their own situation. This involved becoming active citizens who have 'voice' and collectively removing barriers to entitlements by opening up or making use of public spaces already available to them. Seeking allies among powerful actors, including duty bearers, and establishing relationships with a wide range of stake holders was another key strategy for influencing decisions in favour of women's practical needs and strategic position. Once recognition had been established, rights claiming for redistribution of resources or power was done strategically and often in a more indirect manner.

When revisiting the criteria mentioned in section 1.3 for sound action research, we can conclude that all the projects scored well on:

- Process validity: the activity was educative and informative.
- Democratic validity: the research was undertaken in collaboration with all involved with the problem under investigation
- Catalytic validity: the research transformed the realities of those involved
- Dialogic validity: the research was discussed with peers in different settings.

In terms of Outcome validity (did it solve the problem?), all the projects succeeded to some degree in addressing rights failures that community women face in daily life. The results can also be considered as sustainable as both the civil society organizations and community women involved have obtained increased knowledge, skills and agency to effectively work on the realization of rights of women in a systematic and structural manner.

What happened within each trajectory was in fact an experimental journey for everybody involved, including KIT. Both partners and local women experienced a different way of working; a different way of looking at development including their roles and responsibilities as civil society organisations; and a different – more equal – relationship between them. They also experienced the excitement of being equipped to question and investigate rights failures and subsequently address issues of recognition and redistribution which lie at the heart of the rights violations at stake in a particular governance setting. The identity of local women changed from being *victims* to being *agents*. Narratives were dismantled and discourses started to change. Change processes were started and typically were on-going well after the end of the formal project. As a staff member from RADI in Senegal put it,

*'Real participation is the main gain of action research. Women take their own destiny in their hands.'*

## PART II





# Story on political participation in Niger

## The struggle of women in Zinder: an irreversible dynamic

Hassanou Mallam Sani<sup>29</sup>

In Niger, women from the capital city are usually the driving force towards political changes for gender equality. It is quite rare for national initiatives for change to be generated from the provinces or rural areas. However, a group of women from Zinder realised that, despite the quota law adopted in 2000 which ought to be facilitating women's access to political posts, their political participation remained limited. They decided, with the support of the NGO Alternative (Association Alternative Espaces-Citoyens), to investigate the existing legal and institutional instruments and their implementation so as to identify the principal obstacles to women's access to decision-making positions. As a result, a group of barely literate women from a conservative religious context were able to throw light on the lack of implementation of the quota law. And they have succeeded in advancing their cause in a context where it is all too common to hear such comments as: *'simply daring to look at a man in the face is a sign of disrespect!'*

## A hostile environment that takes a toll on people, especially women...

Niger, a landlocked country of the Sahel in West Africa, has for decades occupied the lowest position in the United Nations Human Development indices. The country is strongly affected by the overall conditions in the Sahel, which exacerbate poverty and vulnerability, the impact of which differs amongst various social groups. In rural areas, living conditions are far tougher than in urban centres. Rural women are most affected by these difficult economic and environmental conditions.

Niger is composed of eight regions, including Zinder which is located in the east central part of the country, some 1000 kilometres from the capital, Niamey. The region is strongly Islamized and characterized by a high fertility rate of over 3%.<sup>30</sup> Households are very vulnerable, in particular to seasonal food insecurity. Access to basic social services, such as health, water and good quality education, remains a luxury. In urban and rural areas alike, women bear the brunt of poverty.

Women's role is limited to the household in the name of tradition and a certain specific interpretation of Islam. As such, politics is considered to be a male prerogative and too 'dishonest' for women to be involved in. In fact, the dominant ideology reduces women to a subordinate position to men, regardless of their age or social status. This poses a strong obstacle to the participation of women in public life, as is clear, for instance, in the case of Hawa Juge.

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<sup>29</sup> Hassanou Sani is the author of this case study. He managed the project for Alternative in collaboration with Balkissa Hamidou, Abdourahmane Ousmane, Nana Hekoye and Souley Adji.

<sup>30</sup> Recensement général de la population et de l'habitat Niger 2001.

### 'Hawa Juge'

#### **Men say, 'It is not good that the market of a Muslim city be run by a woman'**

Ms Houa Ali, also known as Hawa Juge, was born in 1952 in Konni (Tahoua region). Unlike many young girls her age, she had the good fortune to study up to College for General Education level (a total of ten years of schooling). This was a lot in Niger, where the school enrolment rate was 20% in 1970. Hawa hardly had time to finish college before she was taken out of education by her parents, to be married.

Hawa has been living in Zinder since 1987. She has been supporting her eight children since she was widowed in 1983. For 27 years she struggled to meet her children's needs. Hawa never relied on other people. She worked hard to keep her independence. Thus she has been a salesperson in a shop, an entrepreneur, a volunteer with the Red Cross and finally an employee in public works. Since 2005, Hawa has been the president of the Women Entrepreneurs of Zinder (women managers of construction and other enterprises). As such, she spends most of her time arguing with men entrepreneurs in the construction market.

In 2005, she became the manager of Dolle, the large market in Zinder. In just one week, she succeeded in achieving returns equivalent to the monthly income raised by the previous manager, a man. The (male) merchants of Zinder came together to put an end to management by this woman whom they found to be too 'orthodox'.<sup>31</sup> They used a religious pretext to justify their action. In their own interpretation, the market of a Muslim town like Zinder cannot be run by a woman. According to them, this can only attract the evil eye to the market in general. These men forget that during the days of Caliph Umar, the large market of Medina was run by a woman.

They started by lobbying the local administrative and political authorities (i.e. the Governor, the Sultan). These latter, however, could not find a legal justification to dismiss Hawa, who had all existing legal and judicial instruments on her side, in addition to the fact that she was performing very well. When the men could not get the authorities to support them, in June 2005 they organised a demonstration against her.

It was only in 1996, some 36 years after independence, that the first woman was appointed to government in Niger. In 1999, only one of the 82 parliamentarians was a woman. As a result of pressure from civil society, in 2000 the government adopted a quota law in order to address this situation, applicable in electoral processes, and governmental and administrative appointments. In the 2004 general elections, the implementation of the quota law resulted in some advances: 14 women parliamentarians out of a total of 113 (12.38%) and the appointment of eight women ministers out of 32 (25%).

Now, more than a decade of the introduction of the quota law, certainly some advances have been noted. Yet, the conditions of women are far from satisfactory, especially in the Zinder region where conservative socio-cultural considerations still constitute serious obstacles to women's emancipation.

In addition, since independence, the country has been marked by recurrent political instability. Indeed, following a period of intense crisis, Niger witnessed another military coup d'état in February 2010<sup>32</sup> which led to a twelve month transition period before returning to civilian rule. This period was used to spark reforms within various sectors, notably the Personal Status Code which is a moderate version of the Family Code.

<sup>31</sup> i.e. by following regulations, rather than bending rules or taking a 'cut' of the proceeds.

<sup>32</sup> i.e. during the implementation period of the project

Despite the gender related difficulties facing women in Niger, this bill has been proposed and subsequently rejected several times since the national conference of 1990. Unfortunately, this time also, its introduction to the public debate stirred a huge social storm. No serious preparation had been done to ensure its success, and neither political organisations nor civil society had been involved in the process. This suggests that the authorities themselves did not fully support it.

Within this tense environment, undertaking actions in favour of women's position in society became uncomfortable and even dangerous, creating an obstacle to the promotion of women's rights.

### The quota law: a timid advance

Despite the advances made possible through the quota law, women from the Zinder region are under-represented in the management of public affairs. Of the 20 parliamentarians from the region, only three are women. Of the 740 local municipal council members, only 135 are women (18%). All of the 55 mayors as well as the head of the Zinder Urban Council are men. All five department prefects are men. There are no women heading an administrative post in local government even though these fall in the lower echelons of the national administration, where it is usually thought to be easier for women to access positions.

It is within this challenging context that a group of women from Zinder, with the support of Alternative and the WAGIC programme, decided to initiate an intervention to improve and widen their space for citizenship action and realise their right to political participation. Their intervention was based on the observation that, after more than ten years of implementation of the quota law, women's political participation remains limited. Looking at the composition of the local councils, it seemed that the quota law was not respected.



The Alternative/WAGIC team Photo by Abdulaziz also known as DJ OXY, Zinder 2010

This group of women decided to investigate the situation in ten targeted communities using an action research approach, to identify the reasons for what appeared to be violations of the quota law. In order to better undertake this initiative, women needed to strengthen their capacity. Thus, Alternative, armed with the financial and methodological support of the WAGIC programme, organised a series of workshops. The first workshop focused on research techniques. Immediately after the training, women started collecting data from the targeted communities. After that, and with the support of Alternative, they moved to analysing and interpreting the data. This allowed them to tease out some very important conclusions.

## Mobilising popular expertise for research

In 2009, the state of Niger recruited conventional researchers to evaluate the implementation of the quota law. Their work, which extended over several months, focused on the impact of the law on women's political participation. No deficiencies in the law or any form of institutional obstacles were revealed by that study.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the research carried out by the women researchers of Zinder, together with the staff of Alternative, was able to shed light on the obstacles and deficiencies which undermine the effectiveness of the quota system. The main obstacles to the effectiveness of the quota law in Niger are below.

### ***1 The deficiencies in the quota law itself***

If the configuration of some local councils seemed to have violated the quota law, this was due to deficiencies in the provisions of the law. The quota law targets the electoral lists of the political parties and not the council itself. The law requires that each party list (and not each council) include a minimum of 10% of either sex. The implementation decree also stipulates that each list (and not each council) of three or more elected candidates includes both sexes. If a list is composed of less than three candidates, then it is no longer required to include a woman candidate. This explains why municipal councils of more than 10 members from different political parties may not necessarily include any women.

*For instance:* In a given community of twelve municipal councillors from six political parties, if each party has two elected councillors, none of them is obliged to hold a seat for women. As a result, the municipal council of 12 members will be an all-male council.

### ***2 Decreasing size of electoral boundaries***

Prior to the process of decentralization in Niger, the region was considered to be the electoral boundary for the legislative elections. As such, it was easier for a political party to have more than three elected candidates which would have obliged them to implement the required quota. However, in 2004, the electoral boundary was reduced to the level of the District [French: *Département*], thus limiting the possibility of implementing the quota law, because in the smaller district, it is much more difficult for one political party to secure the number of seats necessary to require them to reserve a seat for women. Therefore, one

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<sup>33</sup> Report of the evaluation of the implementation of the quota law, MPF/PE 2009.

political party may be able to secure two seats in three districts, thus a total of six elected members, without the obligation of reserving a seat for women.

### **3 *The non-application of the quota law for nominated posts***

Violation of the quota law was also possible because the implementation decree requires that for a violation to be contested, it needs to be done by individuals who have a direct interest in doing so. Since the promulgation of the quota law, nobody has opted for legal recourse in order to challenge the violation of the quota system at the level of nominated posts. Furthermore, the decree does not include a procedure to allow the public to have recourse to the constitutional court, which has the legal jurisdiction to hear such cases.

## **Leading to action**

The women researchers and Alternative jointly decided that a revision of the quota law would be necessary to ensure the right to political participation of Nigerien women. In order to achieve this, they opted for advocacy. It is within this framework that this group of women developed a synergy with numerous other actors of civil society, amongst whom the Social Movement for Gender Equity was prominent. This is a wide coalition of organisations working for women's advancement. This movement was also calling for raising the set quota for women from 10% to 30%. A number of exchanges took place revolving around the suggestions of both the movement and the group of women researchers which were eventually amended and validated as a joint proposal.

In order to support this joint proposal, the women were planning to organise large-scale mobilisation in both Zinder and Niamey. The aim was to put pressure on the authorities so that they would accept the proposed revision. Unfortunately, at the moment when the women had started mobilising different actors, the context experienced a shock with the inappropriate introduction of the 'Personal Status Code.' As a result, many actors who were at first committed to the proposal to revise the quota law started to withdraw. They did not want to be seen as publicly supporting initiatives aiming at empowering women, because of the pressure from conservative Islamists.

Despite these drawbacks, the women researchers did not give up. In April 2011, they decided to submit their proposal directly to the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, which could discuss and present it to the government, rather than having a big public demonstration.

## **When we act, we can change others...**

Through this action research project, the women researchers gained competencies which allowed them to support other women who were unable to enjoy their rights because of problems related to interpretation and implementation of the quota law. They became 'experts' in the subject of women's political participation, motivated and capable of supporting other women in their struggle.

### **Municipal Councillor 'Made In Alternative/WAGIC'**

Zoulaha Moussa is a 55-year-old widow, a mother of three daughters. For 16 years, Zoula has struggled alone to support her family. She earns her living through transporting 50 kgs of peanut oil on her head to be sold in the local market. She does this all day long and every day. That is how Zoula was able to ensure the schooling of her three daughters.

Zoula has been a political activist since the coming of democracy to Niger in 1990. Unlike many political opportunists, she has never changed political parties. Nor has she ever benefited from any material or financial advantages via her party. On the contrary, with her meagre income, Zoula financed the activities of her party within her neighbourhood (meetings, etc.). As such, she became a genuine leader, especially for women.

Zoula was a candidate in the last elections. After the announcement of the results, her party obtained six seats but refused to reserve one for Zoula, although the quota law applies to them since they had exceeded the minimum of three seats. Faced with this situation, Zoula remembered the action research group of Alternative/WAGIC, which had trained many women politicians on the intricacies of the quota law. She decided to contact the president of the research group. The latter tried to mediate between Zoula and the local party officials. But they refused to rescind their decision.

Therefore the action research group supported Zoula in lodging a complaint to the Tribunal of Zinder for the violation of the quota law. At the first hearing of the case, the court ruled in Zoula's favour. Today, she is well established within her local council. For her, this incident is a mere memory. However, women political activists are not ready to forget what they consider to be an insult to their leader and to women generally. Even today, they threaten to leave the party which shamefully tried to violate women's rights. Since then, Zoula has been nicknamed the 'council member made in Alternative/WAGIC.' This is to indicate that without the awareness raising, training and support of the research group, Zoula's seat would have gone to a man, as was the case with 19 other seats.

Another key intervention of the group of women researchers was raising awareness and mobilising more than 15 women's associations in Zinder and 20 women's associations in Niamey on the right of women to participate in public decision making; on how a quota law can contribute to their better representation; as well as on the importance of their support to the process of revising the current quota law. These associations later took part in mobilisation media campaigns which were broadcast on radio Alternative. The audio products from these campaigns were shared with other community radios in the five regional departments. All the latter supported the revision of the law, signing onto the popular petition launched to that effect.

This petition was a significant novelty in this context. Although a maximum of about a thousand signatures were hoped for, the process drew three times this amount: of the 3,271 signatures, there were 1876 men and 1395 women.<sup>34</sup> This actually denotes the significant recognition of the importance of equal sharing of political life by women and men.

At the same time, some religious leaders have begun embarking on a deeper reading of the religious texts – see the box for an example. They are starting to recognise that Islam is not opposed to the promotion of women. They are acknowledging that rather it is tendentious interpretations of some verses and *hadith*<sup>35</sup> which allow some men to perpetuate domination of women.

<sup>34</sup> For 9 names the sex could not be established. The higher number of men may be due to the higher proportion of literacy amongst men than amongst women.

<sup>35</sup> Reported sayings and anecdotes of and about the Prophet Mohammed.

*Excerpt from an interview with Elhadje Omar Bachir, spiritual leader and religious consultant in Zinder (Alternative Journal, special issue Women's Forum, September 2010)*

**Hassane:** The other question is about access to land. Listening to certain spiritual leaders one gets the impression that it is Islam that prohibits women from accessing land. What do you think?

**Elh Omar B:** Islam is not opposed to women accessing land. It is rather an harmful practice which exists in this sub-region and especially in Niger and in southern Nigeria. The logic presented is that women are weak and that is why men should inherit the land in order to cultivate it. The key verse which determines inheritance rights indicates that: men have the right of two parts of what their parents or relatives have left and women have the right to one part of what the parents or relatives have left. This part, as bestowed by Allah, may be large or small. However, Allah did not indicate in the Holy Koran that what women can inherit excludes land or books or garments. Therefore, women can inherit land as men can. No chapter of the Holy Koran or the Hadith is opposed to that. In fact, people try to find their justifications elsewhere: some people say, for example, that women should not be given land – on the pretext that it will be passed to their husbands.

*The interview also covered, with similar remarks, women's rights to inheritance, freedom from violence and other issues.*

## In changing others, we change ourselves

When the project was first initiated, Alternative started by strengthening the capacities of the group of women researchers. This partnership also allowed Alternative itself to develop a participatory action research methodology which engages women as a social group with rights and entitlements. This method continues to be used in the various projects of Alternative. In addition, and because of this action research project, Alternative has acquired greater visibility in the Zinder region as well as at the national level. In Zinder, the social movement for equity and equality chose to set up its regional base at the Alternative offices.

Similarly, through this action research project, women researchers were able to bring about a significant change in their own situation. More than 50 women who were trained on the complexities of the quota law are now increasingly invited to meetings within their own political parties. In addition, in Zinder region the ten women members of the research team are sought out by various actors engaged in gender and women's rights initiatives. Many women who were associated with this project have acquired a greater capacity to make themselves heard and to claim their rights and entitlements. This is the case of Ms. Oumara, a politician and a member of the action research group who threatened to resign from her party if her name was not placed on the top of the party's electoral list. This is an example of a person who claimed her right effectively, through demanding recognition. In doing so, she has also gained power (see box on p. 80).



### **If there is only one seat, it is mine!**

Ms. Fatime Oumara is a young woman of 32, born to a modest polygynous family, with 23 brothers and sisters, in Mirrah (a locality situated 20 kms east of Zinder). After secondary school, Fatime went to the School of Public Health and became a midwife. Given her attachment to her village, she asked to serve there. For more than ten years, she was a committed midwife who listened to her patients. Her generosity and empathy were such that every woman who came to the district became her friend.

Fatime became so popular that the health administration of Mirrah cannot envisage launching any health awareness campaign without involving her.

In 2004 she was asked to enter politics. She joined the 'Coalition for Democracy and Progress RDP Jamaa,' which was then a small party in the region. However, due to Fatime's popularity, the party developed a considerable constituency in Mirrah and its surrounding areas. During the 2004 municipal elections, the party was in second place in Mirrah. Throughout her political activism, Fatime enjoyed the moral and financial support of her husband, himself a pedagogical adviser. As an activist, Fatime also benefited from the capacity building activities of the Alternative WAGIC project.

The male leaders of the party were aware that the successes of the party were linked with Fatime's popularity. However, in the municipal elections of 2009, the political bureau of the party decided that they should have three seats before allocating one to Fatime.

As soon as she heard about this decision, Fatime called a meeting of the party's political bureau at the house of the chief of the canton (the most respected moral authority and the guardian of tradition). This was a big surprise for everyone. In front of all those present and taking the chief's court as a witness, Fatime made a public declaration: *'Honorable chief, in front of your court, I declare that if, in the next elections, my party has only one seat, it will be mine. Otherwise, I will launch a counter campaign and will ask my supporters not to vote anymore. You will see the results. I do not want to continue to fight for men.'*

After a pause which signified both a confession as well as his helplessness, the president of the party made a solemn promise that Fatime's request would be honored. And that is what happened.

## **Conclusion**

This fight led by women within a challenging context raises some key points. The research was an eye opener on the importance of being vigilant vis-à-vis the existing juridical instruments which regulate social relations. It is not enough for a law to be passed. We need to ensure that its provisions are adequate and that, once applied, it actually produces the desired effect. A new law will also require accompanying measures to enable its operation. Thus when the government agrees to the revision of the quota law, permanent follow-up, analysis and monitoring mechanisms will be put in place by the women researchers of Zinder to ensure its effective application. This will be feasible since the women researchers have proved that with just a little bit of coaching, a small group, even with little education, can undertake research and reach pertinent conclusions which inform change processes. Indeed, once again we realise that 'common sense is what is most shared worldwide'.

The amazing work accomplished by this group of women researchers forces us to re-think the concept of 'expertise' which is often linked to educational level. The dominant view





Hassanou Mallam Sani, second from the left, from Alternative visiting the Songtaab-Yalgré project during a WAGIC regional meeting in Burkina Faso. Photo: Evelien Kamminga

is often that certain social groups (such as women, or children for instance) do not have sufficient competence, knowledge and tools which would allow them to claim and realise their rights. Many of those entrusted to be duty bearers often ignore or abuse their vulnerability. The approach adopted by this project is important for the empowerment of the most vulnerable social groups.

Educational level is often used as an indicator to measure the capacity for exercising citizenship. In other words, the less a person is formally educated the less he or she is presumed to be capable of exercising rights. Yet, the results obtained by this group of women shows that popular expertise is indeed a reality which is embedded in each and every person and only requires an opportunity to blossom. Nevertheless, for more effective action, there is still a challenge yet to be overcome: that is, to work to build more support for the women's proposal to revise the quota law, through ensuring the massive involvement of grassroots people.



# Story on political participation in Mali

Coming out of obscurity: political participation of women in Kati district

Djingarey Maiga and Mariam Diawarra  
(with Moussa Traore and Ibrahima Koreissi)

## Introduction

In Kati District, in the Koulikoro Region of Mali, women and their interests are almost invisible in the political arena, except in very rare cases. Given the denial of women's political rights, two NGOs, Clinique Juridique DEME SO (DEME SO) and Femmes et Droits Humains (FDH – Women and Human Rights) decided to initiate action research within the framework of the WAGIC programme. The initiative was based on the assumption that political participation is a human right and thus a women's right. They organised and supported women who were already active in politics in order to achieve a tangible change in the representation of women's interests at decision-making levels, such as in local government and political parties. This action research project was an alternative to the current intervention models which usually consist of capacity building of women political candidates using training experts. Participatory action research by women who are already politically active enabled them to realise that their right to effective and equitable political participation was severely violated, and opened their eyes to the possibilities of collective advocacy to make institutional changes in the political sphere. The results were profound changes in the women themselves but also at institutional level. The lessons learned also served to strengthen the capacity of the organisations which initiated this activity.

## Living in the shadow of male politicians

The District of Kati surrounds the capital, Bamako. This project took place in the rural district [French: *commune*] of Siby, 60 km west of Bamako, and the urban municipality of Kati, 15 km east of Bamako. The overwhelming majority of the population is Bamanan (Bambara) with a minority of Mandé (Malinké), especially in Siby. The Malinké are known for being animist despite a strong Muslim presence. Men have the dominant social position in Malinké and Bambara family and community.

### *Bambara and Manding sayings*

*'Ni muso mugnuna a cè ye a den bè barika':* if a woman obeys her husband, then her children shall be blessed.

*'Muso bè se ka soma bange nga muso tè se ka kè soma ye':* the woman may bring into the world a fetish/boy/parent, but she is still just a woman.

This inequality is also reflected in political participation. For instance, the Siby local government council has only one woman member to 17 men, while the Kati council has 4 women

to 29 men. The lower representation of women in Siby compared to Kati is probably related to the lower level of education of both men and women, limited access to information and experience with political mobilisation, and the general remoteness of the area.

Political parties are a necessary passage for public office and the springboard for women to participate fully in political life. For women to truly influence decision making so that their needs and specific interests are taken into consideration, it is not sufficient to create women-only committees or to include women's names on electoral lists. Thus, the key question of this action research was: 'how can we strengthen women's citizenship in the District of Kati and ensure their full political participation?' In other words, the project sought change both in terms of representation and of influence on decision making.

## Overview of steps and methods used

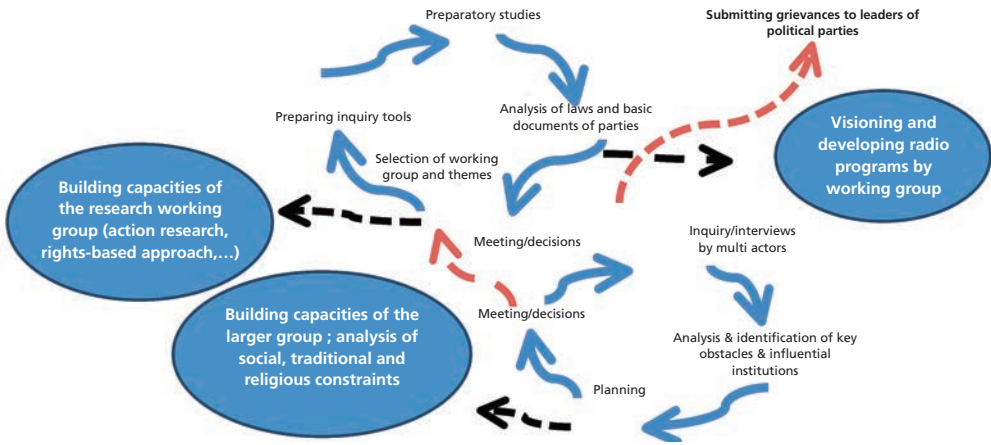
The first step of FDH and DEME SO was to carry out a preparatory study on cultural, social, financial and other constraints that women face, as well as mapping the institutions which are most implicated in women's poor representation in local governance and limited influence on decision making. The analysis indicated that there is a significant obstacle at the level of political party operation.

The two organisations also started to mobilise and involve a large group (30 people each site, Kati and Siby) of various actors (women, religious authorities, customary authorities as well as political and administrative representatives) in the programme design. This strategy aimed at informing and raising awareness as well as building alliances with all actors about the existing programme and soliciting their involvement in the process.

Several training workshops were organised in each site, to introduce the concepts of gender, citizenship and rights, leadership and decentralization, and also to explain what action research and rights-based approaches are about. An exchange visit was organised between women from the two sites. These gatherings were a space for exchange and discussion. They strongly contributed to raising women's awareness of their right to represent and be represented and of the need to develop more solidarity amongst women in order to have a collective voice.

Following that, in each project site, the larger groups decided to create a smaller working group responsible for actively taking on the action research. Both working groups decided to focus on analysing the specific obstacles that women face within political parties. Each small working group was composed of seven women, a mixture of elected women and candidates for election. Following intensive discussions, the women decided to focus on the political parties and the way they systematically exclude women and keep them from having influence. Throughout the project, community radio was used as a tool for awareness raising, information sharing and mobilisation.

**Figure 1 Action research steps and activities undertaken by DEME SO and FDH**



We learned action research by doing. It is an iterative process based on a continuous cycle of asking questions, research, reflection, and action, that is very different from other projects. Figure 1 shows the many different steps and activities that were undertaken by FDH and DEME SO and the working groups.

## Key results and changes achieved

### ***Raising awareness on the right to information and the power of knowledge***

The first research activity that the two women’s groups undertook was comparing their formal political rights and the reality of women’s participation within their own political parties. The data showed that the rights to vote, to organise and to freedom of expression are the same for both women and men in the political party charters and electoral law. Then the women went to look at the reality within their parties, as exemplified in the box.

*Mrs. Aïssa – Candidate in the 2009 local elections*

*‘This year, I learned many things, since I participate in all the meetings whether they are held during the day or night. I do not miss anything. But I had many problems with my campaign. Never mind, I was able to mobilise all the women in my constituency. In the beginning, my party gave me a good position – until the day when the list had to be submitted. The day they went to submit the list, they changed my place and I found myself in the sixth position. Developing the list takes place during tight deadlines and impossible hours. Even if women arrive on top of the list, men remove our names at the last moment because they are the ones who dispatch the lists.’*

In their second round of investigation they looked at the gender composition of various structures within political parties and also at the formal regulations for their functioning. They found out that there is poor representation of women in the local grassroots committees (averaging 36% in Kati and 18% in Siby). In addition, women at this level play the role of campaigners and organisers but do not occupy decision-making positions. Women also discovered that political parties do not respect their obligations as defined by the texts,

such as, for instance, holding regular meetings, sharing information and training women and men political activists, and in the process of developing electoral lists (see box).

During the enquiry, women researchers interviewed either the general secretaries or the presidents of their political parties. They all experienced difficulties in getting the information. Several secretary generals were not aware of the existence of such documents and several party heads were not willing to share a copy of the by-laws.

*'The RPM activist faced a lot of difficulties in her research. Wherever she went, from the secretary general to the other members of the party, she could not find the texts. She had to threaten to resign from the party before the Secretary General would come to Kati to search for the documents so he could give them to her.'*

*'The ADEMA council member could not get the text. The Secretary General, who was elected to parliament, had them, but he was away.'*

This experience showed not only resistance of men but also that many party officials do not know the content of the formal regulations or are not even aware of their existence. This exercise enabled women to realise that access to formal information is crucial and empowering.

### ***The capacity and power to question, investigate, think and act***

The project allowed women researchers from the community to ask critical questions and then look for answers. They wanted to know more about the policies and procedures of their own parties and particularly how these address gender equality and discrimination. They elaborated templates and looked for information from the leaders of their political parties. While doing so they identified and selected potential allies. They then decided jointly on the next steps and which action to take. They also organised regular de-briefing meetings with the larger groups in their communities.

A researcher in Siby felt that she had become *'une personnalité'* (a personality, a publicly recognised figure), who is well informed and has the authority to ask questions of women and men and to be active in public.

### ***The gap between the letter of the law and practice***

Whilst exploring the regulations and basic documents of political parties, women discovered the gap between the letter of the law and the practice. The law may seem 'neutral' in its formulation but can be discriminatory in its effects, in its interpretation or its implementation in a given context. This became obvious to women during the analysis of the electoral law, especially through reviewing Article 82 which stipulates that one criterion of eligibility for being the head or vote assessor of an electoral office is to be able to read and write in French, the official language.

This disposition would exclude therefore, the women and men of the rural ward of Siby, the majority of whom had not had formal schooling. A woman from Siby thus asked the following question: *'So we cannot become heads or electoral officers?'* Suddenly, a woman from the urban community Kati stood up and responded:

*In the texts, there are many articles which insist on equality but, in practice, things are different. Therefore, do not let them convince you of this, otherwise you will be defeated. Look at your local party office! You have many men who can neither read nor write in French, so this law is not really applied. You can read and write. This is pretty much enough to exercise your rights to participate in politics. You do not have to speak French. Don't let yourselves be intimidated by these men. They always try to exclude us, to prevent us from exercising our citizenship. This article cannot prevent us from being presidents or electoral officers. Don't listen. It doesn't prevent men who don't speak French from being chosen.*

This incident really helped to raise the awareness of the rural women of Siby about how discrimination is exercised.

### **Solidarity for the common interest of women**

Women are realising that they need to be in solidarity rather than in competition with each other in order to advance women's interests. Through the action research, they discovered that political decisions about development programmes are often based on the interests and priorities of men, who often do not represent the interests and priorities of women. As such, they needed to ensure that women would reach decision-making positions so that women's concerns become priorities. In Kati, women therefore created a woman's candidacy coalition.

*'We have won': Cross-party collaboration by women*

*During the elections for office bearers in the Kati Local Government Council, the four women councillors (of a council of 33) formed a coalition to support the candidacy of one woman among them, even though they were not from the same political party. As such, after the results were delivered, Alima Demba (one of the women who was not elected and from a different party to the woman who was elected) announced, 'We won!' – meaning that since one woman had won, all women won.*

Another example of solidarity was the collaboration amongst women from different political parties during the research, so as to have better bargaining power with the party leaders (see the box below).

The URD activist was able to find the regulations of her party with the help of the elected council member of the ADEMA party, who explained the significance of the research to the Secretary General of the political party URD (Union for the Republic and Democracy).

Since this project emphasised that citizenship is beyond allegiance to a political party, a network was formed of women candidates from Siby and elected women from Kati in order to exchange experiences and suggestions on how to get elected and work once elected. The ability to bring women from different political parties together around a common goal for a specific period was a significant, and unusual, success of the project.

### **The need for accountability**

The importance of elected women being accountable to women activists and women voters in general was emphasised throughout the project, but the reverse accountability





FDH and DEME SO team visiting the Mayor of Kati, second from the right. Photo: Evelien Kamminga

was also highlighted. As one of the elected women councillors in Kati put it, *'It is not only about electing us but we need your support as women to promote our programme.'*

The fourth deputy mayor of Kati, Oumou Soucko, told the women: *'I am in this position today because of you. I am here because you wanted it. So continue to support me, otherwise tell me now so that I resign.'*

In return, the other women expressed the need to have adequate information on what is going on in the municipality, namely the meetings and plans as well as the ways in which elected members represent the interests and priorities of women.

This message was shared within the rural community of Siby where there was little interaction between the single elected woman and other women. The discovery expressed by women political activists was the following:

*'We thought our role was limited to electing our leaders, but now we know that we must continue monitoring them and make sure that they deliver on the promises they made to us'*

This notion of councillors being accountable was expanded to other duty bearers in local government. Women started to ask critical questions about the electoral processes as well



as of the quality and transparent management of public goods. A specific issue that emerged, for example, was the complaint by market women over the lack of transparency in the use of the tax money which they pay as merchants.

### **Collective action as citizens: Joint formulation of demands**

Collective reflection and analysis led women to formulate their complaints. In Siby, they submitted a petition to the political party leaders in which they claimed their rights to improve the governance of political parties, demanding: *'better representation of women within structures in political parties, a better flow of information within the party, a process to build the capacities of party members, and parity in specific instances of decision making and in electoral lists.'*

In addition to the petition to political leaders, the women of Kati chose an advocacy theme addressed to political parties with implications for national legislation, namely: *'to develop and support, between now and 2013, a local government quota law applicable within political parties.'*

The five political party leaders involved in the action research publicly stated that they were taking note of the requests made by the women and promised to take these into consideration during subsequent elections for party office bearers. This should result in a better representation of women within political parties in both Siby and Kati as well as a better positioning of women on the electoral lists submitted by political parties for the upcoming elections of 2014 – the expectation is that there will be at least one women for every two men.

## **Main lessons learned**

The action research process enabled the local women's groups as well as the NGOs DEMESO and FDH to achieve important and significant results. In addition, the process gave opportunity for learning, and several key lessons were teased out over the three years of the project. These included the following.

- The participatory approach emphasised and enabled the exchange of experiences and good practices. It served to reinforce partnership amongst the different key actors and engaged them in collaborative and coordinated actions which are absolutely necessary for changing mentalities and practices. All decisions were made during the general meetings with all participants or within the small working groups.
- The flexibility of the action research methodology strongly contributed to success. It was remarked that, *'Gninini ni waleyaliyetodenye, ni yedô ta, dôKôbèbô'* (Action research is like a plate of tôt, if you take one mound, you discover the back of another)<sup>36</sup> referring

<sup>36</sup> Tôt is the staple carbohydrate dish, made with grain flour (often millet or sorghum), to which hot water is added, and moulded into a mound. It is eaten by scooping smaller mounds out with the fingers, and dipped into sauce.



The research team in Siby led by the councillor on the left. Photo: Debby Gray

to the fact that in action research every answer reveals new questions. Sufficient time is also an important factor, as changes may become necessary at any moment and at all levels of the process, i.e. in terms of strategies, objectives and activities.

- A key conducive factor was the transparency and party political neutrality of DEME SO and FDH, the civil society organisations which facilitated the mobilisation of women into the programme. Staff members of both organisations were already very well known by local women and, hence, trust was already established.
- A further significant lesson learned was that sometimes the letter of the law may be 'neutral' but there may be discrimination against women in practice, and it is important to distinguish these.

The involvement of women of the community in the action research project made them much more visible. Even those women who had been activists for a long time or candidates, were not always known on the political scene. The research also helped them become better known in their political parties and, as a result of the various de-briefing and validation activities, with the wider group of participants.

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## Conclusion

Despite the weight of sexist public institutions, traditions, popular songs and religious interpretations amongst the Bamana in the east as well as the Mandé to the west of Kati District, two groups of women came together to ask the question, 'How do we reinforce our citizenship for full political participation?' The quest for answers brought changes to their communities, as the results were not limited to improving self-confidence amongst women working directly on the research. There was a perceptible change in how local authorities perceived women. Greater solidarity amongst women active in politics has allowed a better recognition of women as political actors, the beginning of a more equitable distribution of decision-making power, and a redistribution of positions within political parties. But perhaps the most remarkable change was the sense of responsibility amongst activists within political parties to demand that their elected members and all government officials be accountable in representing the women of their community.

A genuine form of active citizenship is taking shape in the rural ward of Siby and the urban ward of Kati, as women become more aware of their rights and of the practical tools they can use to investigate and claim their rights from relevant institutions. Women are challenging injustices, both produced by institutions and by men political party leaders. They have created solidarity amongst women so that they can be elected and finally come out of obscurity.



# Story on access to justice in Senegal

Local justice for women: breaking the silence on violence

Rokhaya Gaye, Gnilane Faye and Mohammedou Cheikh Fall  
(with Binta Sarr, Dauda Diop, and Youssoupha Ndiaye)

## Background

Senegal is a country of paradoxes where modernity, traditions and religions co-exist. Gender relations are marked by male domination within the family, in religion as well as in the larger public sphere generally. This situation explains in large part violence against women as well as the difficulties that women face in accessing justice institutions and in obtaining fair results. Violence against women and girls is a common occurrence which seems even to be on the increase.

What happens to the perpetrators of violence and what happens to the victims? What do communities do in such cases? What can be done to so that the rights of women and girls who are victims of violence are better protected? In trying to address these questions, APROFES and RADJ engaged in an action research project entitled: 'Violence against women and girls: The problem of access to justice.' Through this work, a group of women researchers from the communities of Thioffack and South-Yeumbeul became committed to this cause. We share here not only what we found but also what we learned and what we did as women's rights activists.

## The two sites

**Thioffack** is a peripheral area within the ward [French: *commune*] of Kaolack, a large city in the groundnut basin of central Senegal. The population is 4,484 according to 2010 projections.

**South-Yeumbeul** is one of the 16 wards of the District [French: *Département*] of Pikine. It is located in the centre of the suburban area of Dakar and was created through a merging of the two traditional villages of Thiaroye Kao and Yeumbeul. According to the last National Population and Housing Census of 2002, its total population is 80,439 inhabitants (composed of 40,253 women and 40,186 men).

Both sites are characterized by their extreme poverty, poor living environment (rainy season flooding, unsanitary conditions), chaotic housing, growing insecurity, and inadequate infrastructure of electrical installations, water supply and health services, etc.

Yeumbeul is a particularly dense and poorly lit area where rape and murder are frequent. Thioffack suffers from a high illiteracy rate, especially amongst women, with a persistent

trend of low access to school for girls. In addition, the school drop-out rate amongst girls is high as girls are obliged to work as housemaids in the neighbouring areas or in Dakar in order to help support their families. In short, these are areas where social and economic rights of (female and male) citizens are not secured by the state.

## **Participatory action research as a strategy for change at the community level**

For some years the Association for the Promotion of Senegalese Women (APROFES), and the African Network for Integrated Development (RADI), two organisations known for their commitment to the fight against violence against women, have been active in these two areas. We have developed several prevention and protection strategies focussed on women and girl survivors of violence. However, the statistics from our 'Listening Centres' indicate a high prevalence of physical and sexual violence against women and girls. These instances of violence, often hushed up, are not addressed either by informal mediators or by the formal justice system, despite the existence of laws in Senegal which prohibit violence against women and provide for sanctions against it.

In order to contribute to upholding rights to bodily integrity, APROFES and RADI agreed to pool efforts within the framework of WAGIC. As such, we implemented a joint action research project together with the participation of women and girls affected, in order to better understand the root reasons why women and girl survivors of physical and sexual violence rarely use the justice system. We also wanted to investigate what happens in those cases where women and girls *do* have recourse to the justice system, how they are treated by the existing formal and informal mechanisms, and what is the real and perceived quality of the service they receive.

## **Community participation in the process of action research**

The first step was to change the mode of intervention in these two sites. We decided to change how we engage with the community, especially women – we wanted to include them in the process rather than coming in and pretending to solve their problems for them.

First, focus groups were organised by and with women from partner organisations in the community, then with prominent people, religious leaders and community organisations of young women and men. Then, interviews were organised by the local women researchers with violence survivors, their families and with traditional mediators. The main idea was to assess the level of knowledge of violence; the methods of conflict resolution used and their results; the obstacles to and opportunities for access to justice; the level of use of legal aid funds; and informants' perceptions of citizenship as implying being a holder of rights to bodily integrity and freedom from violence.

After analysing the results from this diagnostic process, the group of women researchers from each community organised a de-briefing meeting in order to share the outcomes with women and different stakeholder groups in each area.

## Results of the community-based studies

### ***A good level of knowledge on violence against women and girls and the methods of resolution***

The study revealed that there was a good level of knowledge among both women and men of the different forms of violence against women and girls, mainly as a result of the prior work done by the para-legal staff of both organisations. Nevertheless, violence against women continued to occur. Most often, this was domestic violence, within the household. In this situation, the wife who was the victim of violence most often solicited the intervention of her father, uncle or brother and sometimes that of the community leaders (district representatives, imams, and other prominent people). For cases of sexual violence, and specifically the rape of girls, local communities did not hesitate to take the matter to the court and therefore clearly indicated 'don't mess about with this.'

Knowledge about the different forms of violence was on the rise, yet physical and sexual violence were only recognised as violations of the rights of women and girls when these occur outside the household.

### ***Perception of the mechanisms of conflict resolution***

People had less experience with formal justice which is regarded as complicated and costly. Nonetheless, it inspired more confidence in women than informal justice mechanisms. People found the procedures of non-formal justice systems to be more supple and flexible, and considered this system as indispensable to the community for several reasons: it ensures respect for traditions ('*maslaa*' and '*sutura*'),<sup>37</sup> prevents break up of marriages and is more accessible. However, women had lost confidence in this form of justice because most often decisions taken were based on a compromise that is often unfavourable to women. In other words, informal justice is influenced by gender relations and by the status of women and girls and cultural stereotypes about the appropriate behaviour of women and girls and their roles and responsibilities.

### ***Obstacles to access to justice by women and girls at the level of tribunals***

The obstacles to accessing justice through formal justice mechanisms identified by women victims of physical violence were the same in the two research sites. They were: 'socio-cultural oppression' (fear of being held responsible for domestic dissent; fear of being stigmatized); illiteracy; lack of knowledge of judicial procedures; the length of time required; corruption; and limited financial means to invest in lawyers' fees, medical certificates etc.

<sup>26</sup> *Sutura*: Wolof word signifying 'discretion.' *Maslaa*: Wolof of Arabic origin which, at the level of human relations, signifies concession and even compromise, the aim being to reach consensual situations.

Families of the victims often mentioned the absence of a structure targeting violence against women and girls and of community based support to help in navigating the procedures and building the required case dossier.

### ***Lack of knowledge of the legal aid fund***

Interviewees in both sites were little aware of the existence of the legal aid fund, and knew even less about the modalities to access it. They suggested that knowledge about this fund be simplified and disseminated so as to help victims of violence to meet the prohibitive costs of formal justice (legal fees, administrative and medical fees, etc.)

### ***Women's perception of their citizenship***

Overall, women perceived their citizenship as an ensemble of rights and responsibilities that the community must recognise.

In **Thioffack**, women indicated that their community did not recognise their right to have authority in the management of local structures (such as neighbourhood committees, health committees, etc.), or in decision making (such as neighbourhood councillor, mayor). They indicated that other rights are also not recognised, such as girls' right to education and the right to be free from physical and sexual violence within the household.

In **South-Yeumbeul**, women said that the level of their citizenship has improved. They are now well represented in decision making, such as through the Sports and Culture Association, local government, the Consultation Framework, and the network of women councillors, etc. However, they stated that there is still much more to do to have significant presence within decision-making circles.

This research de-briefing meeting resulted in the collective decision of the women researchers and the communities to undertake three priority strategies:

- Reinforce the understanding of the whole community (women and other actors) of different kinds of physical and sexual violence as violations of the rights of women and girls, and raise awareness on all existing mechanisms for accessing justice.
- Put in place a local team able to address women's immediate needs as well as their strategic interests (e.g. street lights which would immediately help in preventing attacks, as well as a justice system that is more protective in general).
- Reinforce the capacities of team members in negotiation and mediation techniques, gender and women's leadership, advocacy and lobbying skills to ensure that women's and girls' rights are effectively taken into consideration during mediation.





Training workshop for the group of researchers in Thioffack.

## Information, training and awareness raising activities

Information, training and awareness raising activities have contributed to raising the level of recognition of the problem and have also heightened mobilisation for action. At a later stage, advocacy activities targeting local authorities and administration followed, and finally the establishment of local cadres to provide support.

The training of the 'Spokespersons Group' publicly broached the questions of violence against women and sanctions against violence. This workshop, which took place in Thioffack, brought together around 30 participants and extended over three days. Participants came from all walks of life, and included community women, elected women, coalitions of NGOs, local councillors, the Association for the Development of Qu'ranic Teaching, as well as families of victims of violence.

The training methodology was participatory and was based on valuing the experiences of the participants. The workshop focused on the judicial framework related to violence against women and its intersection with the concepts of gender, leadership and advocacy.

Training sessions on negotiation and mediation techniques were also organised in both project sites. Ninety-seven people attended these sessions, 70 of whom were women.

Their profiles included elected women, leaders of women's and youth community based organisations, neighbourhood delegates, survivors of violence, relatives and friends of violence victims, members of the Cadre De Concertation (a local conflict resolution committee), and opinion leaders in the community.

The discussion of leadership prompted participants to realise that without their active involvement and consequent assumption of responsibility to end it, violence against women and girls will never be eradicated. The advocacy theme allowed participants to recognise the different steps of an advocacy process and to put in place an advocacy plan. Addressing the concept of gender and linking it to gender based violence allowed participants to understand that violence against women is a gender issue and relates to relations and constructions of gender.

The rights-based approach training workshop brought together ten participants in South-Yeumbeul. This pushed the participants to rethink key conceptual issues, such as: Who are rights holders? Who are duty bearers? What should we do to ensure that duty bearers effectively play their role? It also pushed them to develop answers to these questions and better understand their own role, within their organisation, in making these answers effective. An outcome of the workshop was a plan of action. This included following up on the commitments made by the local authorities to different interventions to fight against violence against women.

## Creation of community groups to learn and to act

Through spontaneous action, local community activist groups [French: *cadres*] were formed, representing the diversity of South-Yeumbeul and Thioffack. These were the Alliance for an Active Citizenship in Thioffack and the South-Yeumbeul Consultation Group which set up a Task Force to fight violence.

The community groups formulated the following as their mission:

- Monitor the respect of rights and alert others in cases of violation.
- Support and counsel victims.
- Initiate advocacy actions to get authorities to act to limit the phenomenon of violence and/or support victims of violence.

This process of taking on ownership by the community of the problem of violence against women also involved assuming some financial responsibility, important in a context where women's income is negligible. For instance, a solidarity fund was set up in Thioffack to support victims in meeting financial costs. This fund is now turning into a full-fledged institution as cases of violence are referred to the Citizens' Alliance of Thioffack by neighbouring communities as well. In South-Yeumbeul, the Consultation Group has received cases referred to them by the police. In Thioffack, through the intervention of a local activist, the paedophilic marriage of a fifty year old man with an eleven year old girl was annulled by the public prosecutor [French: *le procureur*] through the formal justice system.



South-Yeumbul Consultation Group meeting with community leaders (Pikine) Photo: Evelien Kamminga

## Changes achieved

On-the-ground activities implemented in collaboration with women and other actors in the community did not take long to produce results.

### ***Public debates on sexual violence***

The discourse on sexual violence was brought to public spaces and is no longer considered only important for and by women. Men express themselves easily on the question of violence and invoke religious texts which prohibit it. Indeed, Nafi, a young woman who is a member of the Thioffack Citizens' Alliance, says that she no longer feels embarrassed to talk about violence against women in front of the Imam (Muslim religious leader). The debate and the public denunciation of sexual violence has become a reality. Recognition of the existence and frequency of sexual violence has spread, as well as the recognition that victims of violence are rights holders – and that their rights are violated by this violence.

### ***Women and their allies act to guarantee the rights of victims of sexual violence***

Throughout the project, in both South-Yeumbeul and Thioffack, women are more and more vocal in speaking out on the problem of sexual violence. What is notable is that women can now count on certain duty bearers, who have become allies. For instance, the Mayor of South-Yeumbeul committed himself to sparing no effort to support the Consultation Group in its battle against violence against women and girls. The directors of South-Yeumbeul school agreed to put in place monitoring committees within their own educational institutions, and they actually did so.

A significant change is that in Thioffack the Imams and Qu'ranic teachers now encourage the denunciation of violence and are engaged in advocacy to end impunity for perpetrators. Even better, they have found arguments in Muslim discourses, supported by quotations from the Qu'ran and the Hadiths, which condemn violence against women (see box).

In relation to the household, the Qu'ran reminds men:<sup>38</sup>

*Allah has given you from yourselves wives, and then put between you love and tolerance. And through your wives HE gave you children and grandchildren. And HE gave you good things. Do they believe in the falsehood and they deny the favor of Allah?*

Sura 16 (Mecca): AN-NAHL /The Bees, Verse 72

However, in Sura An-Nissa, the Qu'ran describes a situation where a husband may beat his wife (but not violently) with the aim of having her obey him:

*Men have authority over women, because of the favour that Allah has given them over the others, and also because of the spending they do for them. Virtuous women are obedient (to their husbands), and protect that which should be protected in their husbands' absences. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds (and last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience seek not against them means (of annoyance)., for Allah is high and great!*

Sura 4 (Medina): AN-NISSA / The Women, Verse 34

However, many Hadith report the position of the Prophet on this issue: *'Do not hit the body'; 'Do not spoil your wives' beauty (on the pretext of correcting them)'* (Abou Daoud, Muslim). *'The most perfect believers are those who have the best character. And the best amongst you are those who are the best with their wives'* (reported by at-Tirmidhî, authenticated by an-Nawawî)

However, the most significant result is that the members of community activist groups who have received training now pay much more attention to the rights of their victims in their interventions (see below).

## Access to justice

The results of the study identified the constraints to accessing judicial institutions (police and courts), which included socio-cultural realities, lack of knowledge of judicial procedures, as well as the high costs involved. That is why we started advocacy for a free medical certificate since this is a key document for the overall judicial procedure. During a workshop on 'How to Revive Women's Solidarity and Advocacy around Access to Justice for Women and Girl Victims of Violence' held in Kaolack, 18 participants from the women's

<sup>38</sup> Mohammed Asad's translation of these verses are:

Qu'ran 16:72 And God has given you mates of your own kinds and has given you, through your mates, children and children's children, and has provided for you sustenance out of the good things of life. Will men, then, [continue to] believe in things false and vain, and thus blaspheme against God's blessings?

Qu'ran 4: 34 Men shall take full care of women, with the bounties which God has bestowed on them more abundantly than upon the latter, and with what they may spend out of their possessions. The righteous women are the truly devout ones, who guard the intimacy which God has ordained to be guarded. As for those women whose ill-will you have reason to fear (on whose part you fear nushuz – disloyalty, rebellion, ill-conduct), talk to them persuasively, then leave them alone in bed (without molesting them) then (adribu) them (i.e. either separate from them, or resume sleeping with them when they are willing and seek peace); and if they return to obedience, do not seek an excuse for blaming them: For God is Most High, Great (above you all).

movement, community based organisations and human rights organisations committed themselves to mobilising around advocacy to guarantee free medical certificates. They also committed to collective advocacy to require the Senegalese government to guarantee full medical support (analyses, x-rays and other tests) and psycho-social support to girls and women victims of violence.

To improve access to and functioning of informal mechanisms, action included the creation and selection of activists, such as male and female mediators, and activities to build their capacities and create accountability mechanisms. The action research team designed a follow-up sheet for each mediation, to facilitate monitoring the process and its results. The sheet is filled by an activist after each mediation session. During regular meetings, the activists then review all the different cases to assess their quality as well as identifying follow-up action points.

Because the decisions returned by these community based conflict resolution mechanisms do not always guarantee the rights of women and tend to favour men, capacity-building of traditional mediators was undertaken in gender, rights-based approaches and mediation and negotiation techniques in order to improve their interventions.

*During the training of the members of the Thioffack Citizens' Alliance on mediation, we were apprehensive about the reaction of men (prominent people and imams) who were amongst the participants in the session. In effect, these are the people who are called on most often in cases of conflict. We were afraid of a negative reaction. However, and to our great surprise, one of them spoke after the training recognising the limits of the way in which they had done mediation before, and committing them to ensure that victims' rights are better protected in the future.*  
Ndèye Gnilane FAYE – Coordinator RADI/Kaolack

## Initiatives for the future

An advocacy/lobbying campaign is being planned aiming at securing civil party status in cases of violence against women and girls. With civil party status, NGOs will be able to better help survivors of violence in the courts. In addition, there are initiatives to begin a debate on sexual and physical violence within the household.

## Conclusion

Violence against women occupies an important place within the numerous programmes of both RADI and APROFES. In fact, the reputation of both organisations was built as a result of years of interventions in Senegal on the promotion and protection of the human rights of victims of violence. However, the WAGIC programme, which permitted the collaboration of the two organisations and especially the use of participatory research action methodology, allowed them to highlight tools that people can use, analyse and improve together with women.

The inclusion of community leaders in the whole participatory research process facilitated their involvement and commitment to fight violence against women and girls. The Consultation Group in South-Yeumbeul and the Citizens' Alliance in Thioffack became learning spaces which can ensure the sustainability of activism for gender-inclusive citizenship.

Today, several actions still need to be completed, such as the advocacy for free medical certificates and for civil society organisations to be constituted as civil parties in court cases involving gender-based violence. The two organisations will continue to work in order to achieve these objectives. Meanwhile, the project has succeeded in 'breaking the silence' on sexual violence in the two project sites.



# Story on economic rights in Burkina Faso

**Valuing the socio-economic rights of women producers of shea butter: a case of active citizenship by the women of Gampela, Burkina Faso**

Noelie Ouedraogo  
(with Blandine Tondé)

## Introduction

In Burkina Faso, as in most places in Africa, women often organise in groups in order to address harsh economic conditions. In the village of Gampela, located some 17 kilometres east of Ouagadougou, women from the group Teeg-wendé ('Guided by God'), in addition to farm and domestic work, undertake the collection and processing of shea nuts, for local consumption as well as for export.

They also cultivate sesame seeds and bissap (hibiscus flower) and raise livestock. Teeg-wendé has been supported for several years now by a national organisation, Songtaab-Yalgré Association (ASY).<sup>39</sup> Hence, Teeg-wendé benefited from technical and financial support which enabled them to construct buildings on the premises which houses their centre, as well as purchase equipment needed for the production of shea butter.

Just when Teeg-Wendé was in the process of consolidation, and as women were starting to make a regular income and become visible, they received an injunction to vacate the land on which their premises were built. They were told that they could only collect wild shea nuts, which grow at the periphery of their village and that this was a matter of public utility because there were plans to construct a by-pass around Ouagadougou (the capital city). With the help of Songtaab-Yalgré, the women engaged in a battle to challenge this threat and secure land for the association and sustainable access to natural resources. Through action research, they uncovered the combinations of disadvantages and injustices in land rights that affect them. They understood that these disadvantages and injustices affect them both as women, and as rural dwellers. And they learned collectively how to challenge them.

## Context

Located in the west of the African continent, Burkina Faso, a landlocked Sahelian country 700 km from the coast, is in the transition belt between Guinea-Savannah and the Sahara desert. The country is surrounded by Mali to the north, Niger to the east, Benin to the

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<sup>39</sup> For more than 12 years, the Songtaab-Yalgré women's association has been producing Karipur shea butter. ASY is the first in Burkina Faso to produce certified organic shea butter with the bio label, Karibio. This has allowed them to develop an initiative which covers more than 11 villages and some 3100 women (see [www.songtaaba.net](http://www.songtaaba.net)).

south-east, Togo and Ghana to the south and the Ivory Coast to the south-west. More than 50% of Burkina's population is under 16 years old. Women represent 51.7% of the population. In 2003, the literacy rate amongst men was 29.4% compared to 12.5% for women. According to the UNDP sustainable human development indicators, Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries on the planet. Poverty is particularly acute amongst women. Despite much effort and some changes, women continue to suffer from the burden of those socio-cultural traditions which discriminate against them and from unjust laws, of which the most important is their weak access to property. This is particularly problematic given that the main economic activity in Burkina Faso is agriculture and livestock raising, which constitute 40% of GDP, 86% of assets and 80% of export earnings.<sup>40</sup>

In Burkina, most land in rural areas is regulated by both formal laws and custom. According to the traditional system, the land is either not owned by any one person or is considered to be ancestral land. In practice, this means that the land is under the control of customary authorities. These entrust the land to those (always indigenous men) who live and work on it. Women access land through the transfer by their husbands of a portion of the land that he has use of but which he can also withdraw from them.

This model is often in contradiction with national law and land policy which stipulates that land is owned by the state, which may in turn assign it on the basis of a Western individualistic model of ownership. Hence land sales are now common practice in Gampela. In this case, the transaction takes place between a buyer and an owner. The latter, however, must inform the village chief of the sale. In addition, the state has the right to reclaim the land at any time for public use, provided compensation is paid.

With regard to their shea nut related activities, women have customary rights of land usage only. They collect shea nuts from wild trees growing on communal land and on agricultural fields which are controlled by men. 'Organic' nuts are collected from trees growing in cultivated fields which have received official organic certification and which, as a result, have much higher value on the international (cosmetics) market.

## Awareness raising amongst women

The association Songtaab-Yalgré, which supports Teeg-Wendé, decided to accompany them within the framework of the WAGIC action research project on women's land ownership rights. The problem of land rights and secure access to shea nuts for women had already been raised as a key issue for members (including Teeg-Wendé) during the association's general assembly of 2008. Conscious of the fact that they needed space to survive and develop, the women started to reflect on their future as citizens with more secure and equal entitlements to natural resources.

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<sup>40</sup> Sustainable Human Development Report, Burkina Faso 2000, UNDP.





Meeting of shea butter producing group Teeg-wendé. Photo: Evelien Kamminga

The action research methodology they used enabled them first to understand their own situation. Before, women from Gampela did not have information about the provisions of formal law. They used to think that if they had the approval of customary authorities to use land which they had used for years, this would be sufficient, and more so since their centre was a popular meeting place to celebrate traditional festivals, where people from all walks of life could come together in the open space. They had invested a lot in the premises believing that they were the legal owners. Now they were about to lose both their meeting space and also an important source of income from shea nut sales and shea butter production.

**Rosalie Zagré, widow, 48 years, seven children**

*I always wanted to have some land to plant sesame, but my husband opposed this because he preferred growing beans. After he died, the family land was occupied by his brother who started imposing conditions on me. Even worse, he gave me land that was supposed to be fallowed and sold the rest. I joined the women's group of my village, so that together we can fight for our own cultivation land. We do not want to be on marginal land which can be lost overnight, without compensation.*

The first action that the women decided to take was to contact the local authorities to request that the land of their centre be officially registered on the roster of land acquisition for the area. To their great disappointment, their request was refused. In fact, the local authorities could not respond to their demand since the Burkinabé state had already begun construction of the Ouagadougou by-pass, or 'Great Ouaga' circular road, which would go through the village of Gampela and other sub-villages, eventually occupying some 700 hectares of farm land in the area. The new road would also swallow the women's centre, with their mill, their drying deck, their warehouse for different equipment and products, and their meeting place. In addition, a large part of the agricultural fields and communal land with the shea nuts tree would disappear, thus destroying the results of the many years of community work which the women had invested in managing the environment, including reforestation and maintenance of shea nut trees.

When the women fully realised that they would lose a significant portion of their income from shea nuts and shea butter production and that they would have to leave the premises where they had been established for years, they started to reflect on how they could limit the damage, which would have a social as well as a financial dimension.

Together, they identified strategies and activities that they hoped would enable them to obtain fair and equitable compensation for their losses due to the road construction. They decided to address all the parties with regulatory power over land, in order to assert their rights and demand fair and equitable compensation for the evictions from duty bearers (the state and business institutions).

Accompanied by Songtaab-Yalgré, the project team had meetings with the different administrative, customary and religious authorities of the ward, as well as representatives of state services of the General Directorate of Urban Planning and Public Works (DGUTF); the Ministry of Habitat and Urban Planning (MHU); the General Directorate of Infrastructure and Local and Regional Development (DGAT/DRBR); and the General Directorate of Roads Infrastructure and AGEIM Consulting Engineers company which is entrusted with carrying out the studies required for the construction project. They also carried out secondary research of relevant laws, policies and other documents.

In doing so, women found that there was no registration of the land in the women's name in the municipal archives before the start of the road construction project. As such, they were not eligible for compensation by the state. In addition, AGEIM treats shea as a 'wild' resource, so their work in producing shea nuts and harvesting and processing them was not recognised nor considered in the compensation plan. Also, since the preliminary commission of inquiry for the road construction had only met with men of the village prior to starting construction of the road, without any representation from Teeg-wendé, women's concerns were not recorded and consequently no compensation at all had been planned for them.

The level of the battle was higher than they had envisaged. To become visible, have voice and claim their rights they would have to go beyond the village into channels of local government, state administration and even large business.



Road construction trucks are passing while the women's group, Teeg-wendé, meets. They decided to stop improving their own meeting area. Photo: Evelien Kamminga

## Quantifying losses

As a next step, the women together with Songtaab-Yalgré staff decided to first generate concrete evidence of their financial and social losses. The women took the time to assess and quantify their earnings (financial income), as well as their contributions to the community. Thus they were able to present figures to the authorities so that the latter would realise the significant contribution to the economic life of the community, and therefore the volume of losses as a result of the road construction. During the years 2007, 2008 and 2009, the women's group had made an average yearly income of 3,430,150 Communaute Financiere Africaine Francs (US\$ 6819) from the sale of certified organic shea nuts, thus US\$60 per woman per year. It should be noted that in 2005, the average annual income in Burkina Faso was US\$500. However, more than 40% of the population (of whom 90% live in rural areas such as Gampela) live below the poverty line of US\$1 per day i.e. US\$365 per year. Thus US\$60 is a significant contribution to household economies. This figure does not include income from the production and sale of non-organic shea butter and other cultivation (such as sesame and bissap), which was also lost because of the road construction.

## Citizenship action for asserting rights

Although the women were amongst the most affected and the greatest losers, they were not the only losers in this situation. This pointed to the possibilities of alliances. They organised consultation meetings with stakeholders that helped deepen reflection on the position and rights of women as members of the Gampela community and as Burkinabé citizens. As they held consultations around the question of eviction and the sustainability of their organisation, the women became aware of the need to develop their own negotiation skills for discussions with administrative, customary, political and communal authorities.

The Gampela women also realised that they could not expect a real improvement in their economic situation, nor the materialization of promises made by duty bearers, without a holistic approach which integrates participation and an affirmation of their citizenship. They decided to fight to protect their interests and put in place a monitoring committee which was mandated to follow the progress of cultural and administrative events and meetings of the village council, in order to seize each occasion to create a voice and express their needs and interests as women.

Women organised training workshops to develop their understanding of legal texts which determine their rights as citizens. They developed their capacities for communication, for mobilising other members of the community, and for advocacy. But, above all, they developed their own self esteem.

Thus, during the cultural celebrations of the village chief, an event to which all the customary, religious and communal authorities are invited, they gradually took public stances to express their dissatisfaction and their desire to see their lives changed. The authorities they addressed slowly developed an awareness of women's marginal position in the decision-making bodies of the community and in relation to the allocation of resources.

Women took the initiative to appropriate existing cultural frameworks, where they were able to insert themselves relatively easily, in order to make themselves heard and claim their rights. Thus, during the event of Tigré (an annual cultural festival), a representative of the women took the floor, describing the state of affairs of their organisation and calling on the authorities to address their concerns. A woman *griotte*<sup>41</sup> composed a song about the crucial role that women play in the social and economic development of families, communities and nations.

Through the women's investigations into the implementation of the road construction project, men who had thought they were better placed in the state measures around the evictions realised that the battle was not yet won for them either. They decided to join the women in order to sharpen their analysis of the situation and support actions that were supportive of the activities of women in their village. That is how the chief of the

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<sup>41</sup> Griots (masc.) or griottes (fem.) have many roles across West African cultures – historians, genealogists, advisors, entertainers, messengers, musicians – they are well known for composing extemporaneously to comment on topical issues.

village of Gampela and his advisors came together to support the women's initiative by giving them official title to land for their premises whilst waiting for compensation.

Many men were opposed to such a redistribution of resources to women. Arguments they used included that women were physically weak, poorly organised and not 'responsible' enough to hold and use land sustainably. For them, the official allocation of land with formal title to a women's group represented a waste of scarce resources and a challenge to cultural principles. In addition, they felt that it would be a waste to give land to women instead of getting direct financial benefit by selling the land after the road was built. Indeed, for many men, this would be a good opportunity for business, by moving closer to the new road. They spread malicious rumours about the women and even put pressure the village chief to refuse the final allocation of land to the women. Some men demanded that the women pay a high amount for the land so as to de-motivate other women, and others demanded that they should have only leasehold rights instead of full property rights, undermining the previous negotiations.

The women, who had invested in and developed their land for many years without ever receiving a complaint from the customary authorities, felt disrespected and excluded from membership of their own communities. But they decided to continue to fight to reach their goal. They wanted a deed of ownership or nothing. The battle was tough.

## **Women achieve a change in their status as producers and citizens**

The creation of a monitoring committee composed of ten active women deepened the reflection over the underlying conflicts which constituted obstacles to resolving the women's problems. The meetings and discussion around the eviction issue revealed both latent and overt conflicts. But these discussions also strengthened women in their identity as citizens because they became more aware of the injustice of the situation, and more resolved in their solidarity and motivation to act.

The methodology, in summary, that has proven its effectiveness was to bring women and men together around a common problem – in this case, the eviction – and then, through that, to begin also to discuss the land issues specific to women.

Much more remains to be done. The Gampela women did not get their rights to compensation for eviction fulfilled at the level of the national authorities. Their request came too late according to the legal procedures. This small action research project did not result in changing the laws with regard to ownership of landed property and did not enable the women of Gampela to own land on an individual basis. However, the women of Teegwendé did win official ownership of their land collectively. This success was celebrated! It is already a story that inspires other women's groups across the sub-region.

In addition, with the documentation and quantification of their losses, and their training and practice in negotiation and advocacy, the women are ready to address the public



forum of the Ministry of Habitat and Urban Housing. They intend to claim their right to fair compensation based on the recognition of their rights to and labour in collecting and processing shea nuts, which currently depends only on use-rights to trees, and which has not been recognised..

The action research process clearly strengthened the women individually. But it also strengthened the Teeg-wendé association and helped Songtaab-Yalgre to evolve. The process created a new relationship between the two organisations – one of working together, rather than mere dependence.

The aim sought by women was to gain permanent access to land and property to ensure the security of premises that will allow them to sustain their economic and social activities. The women believe that the improvement of their quality of life necessarily involves equal and guaranteed access to land and property. The action research and advocacy interventions they have implemented have also consolidated their status as citizens.

# Story on economic rights in Senegal

**Women open the debate on access to land: the case of the rural community of Enampore in Ziguinchor, Senegal**

Fatou Gaye Cissé and Badiane Marie-Claire Diatta

## Introduction

The Regional Women's Solidarity Committee for Peace in the Casamance (USOFORAL) is a women's organisation working to improve women's socio-economic status and to build the capacities of women and their organisations in order to support their role in peace building and sustainable development. USOFORAL has been implementing activities in the rural community of Enampore since September 2003. The Casamance is currently subdivided into three regions: Ziguinchor, Kolda and Sédhiou.

Since 1982, Ziguinchor, a region in the south of Senegal which is separated from the rest of the country by the Gambia, has been in the throes of an armed conflict between the Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance (MDFC) and the state of Senegal. The MDFC is demanding its independence whilst the state of Senegal is insisting on territorial integrity. The rural community of Enampore, located in the west of Ziguinchor in Nyassia District on the left bank of River Casamance, was not spared in this conflict. In 2000, the area went through a very difficult period as the army would arrest any person suspected of belonging to the MDFC; while MDFC militia engaged in abductions, set up road blocks, and villages were bombarded by both sides. During these times, women were the ones who reacted by organising spontaneous protest marches from their villages to the administration in Ziguinchor. To this date, the women are convinced that their actions contributed in a major way to the resolution of the conflict.

At the same time, many women found themselves heads of household, whether because their husbands had been killed, had disappeared or had joined the militia. In addition, their rice plots, located in the valleys, are now salinized because of the drought and, as a result, crop production is very low. Consequently, they realised that in order to secure the survival of their families, they needed to invest in other income generating activities such as planting fruit trees – which presupposed their access to plateau land which traditionally belongs to men only, as valley land is only suitable for paddy-rice cultivation.

## A sensitive issue

Control of land is at the origin and the heart of the conflict and had to be on the negotiation agenda for conflict resolution. Seeing their responsibilities on the rise, whether because the husband had died, migrated or simply given up, women seized upon the peace negotiations as an opportunity to improve their rights to access to land and thus their status

– pointing out that if land was being ceded, sold or otherwise lost to outsiders, it would be better for the community if women had land rights also.

The WAGIC programme thus offered an opportunity to women from the rural community of Enampore that resonated with their situation. The Women’s Groups of Enampore Community Area (Regroupement des femmes de l’Espace Communautaire d’Enampore, REFECE), which includes 1200 women, did not hesitate during the launch of the programme in their zone to focus on the problem of their poor access to land. Their choice may seem daring, but it can be understood first and foremost as arising because they have become heads of family, with great responsibility and a certain level of autonomy.

#### **Anastasia Diémé: A victim of tradition**

I was born here, I grew up here, I married here and my father is a native of this village. Tradition says that the father divides the land amongst his sons and lends the rice fields to his daughters. Girls do not get the plateau land.

I do not have land because we can only get a plot from one’s in-laws. I am divorced and I returned to my family of origin and find myself without land. I work on my cousin’s field, who lent me a plot of plateau land. Before, I was working on my father’s land which has now been grabbed by my uncle. I accepted this situation in conformity with the tradition which forced me to leave the land to my uncle and my cousins. In fact, I am my father’s only child whereas my uncle has many children. When my father passed away, my cousins came to snatch the land because, as a woman, I did not have the right to it.

My father cleared and farmed a considerable parcel of land. However, during his time, people did not think of planting fruit trees. I would have certainly reacted differently if there were orchards planted. I had a small portion to cultivate sweet potatoes. My cousins started planting cashew trees and when these grew, I was forced to leave and borrow land elsewhere as my sweet potatoes could not grow in the shadow of cashew trees.

It was through necessity and courage, therefore, that they chose to tackle the issue of land access. It was a determined group of women who, through sharing experiences, sought to convince their sisters of the relevance of the problem of their weak access to land, and of how this is an illustration of the injustice they suffer. Concerned that they could disrupt the traditional animist system put in place by their ancestors, which is based on a strong belief in fetishism (especially in one area, the kingdom of Mof Awi – the land of the king), early in the process women decided to investigate whether, amongst the numerous cultural taboos in the kingdom, there is one that prohibits women from accessing land. This and other steps of the process are presented below.

## **Women join forces**

At the first meeting of the project, the presentations of the three key themes of the WAGIC programme<sup>42</sup> prompted a number of questions from the 25 participants (composed of the presidents of all the member groups of REFECE). When one woman asked, ‘*Do you think that today we could find a more critical issue to resolve than our access to land?*’ all the participants shook their heads, showing a unanimous position on the issue.

<sup>42</sup> Economic rights, access to justice, and political rights.





Farmer from Enampore during interview

So they moved to the second point on the agenda with two key questions: Who will be responsible for this mission? And what are the criteria they must meet? In response to these questions, the women set out a number of conditions. Women selected to carry out the action research should be from the Enampore Area Community and should also fulfil a number of other criteria that they would set with the support of USOFORAL. On the basis of these criteria, every woman who felt capable of undertaking this mission could submit her application. Applications would be reviewed by two representatives from the area and three members of the technical staff of USOFORAL.

**Mrs Ami Bassène: 'To be taken seriously'**

This is a task that can contribute to improving our living conditions and consequently, that of our families. Not everybody could do it. Those who are willing to make that commitment can submit their application to USOFORAL. Those chosen must be accountable to us.

This is how nine women were selected from amongst the candidates to carry out the action research on women and access to land in the rural community of Enampore.

## Women seek information about their rights

The first discovery that women made is that the formal Law of National Domain (*la loi sur le domaine nationale*) allows women access to land and land ownership. As a result, they realised the extent to which their rights were violated and that the rural council clearly had not worked to disseminate and apply this law.

After their training in documentary research, the nine women researchers divided into three groups, going respectively to Enampore (the centre of their rural community), to Nyassia (the neighboring rural community) and to the Regional Agency for Development in Ziguinchor (RADZ) to collect information on actual land holding. The two groups whose investigations were in Enampore Rural Council and RADZ came back with a considerable harvest of information, but the Nyassia group returned empty-handed after many appointments which the Chairman of the Rural Council did not respect. He did not seem to accept that women from another rural community could browse through the records of his community.

The review of the land registers at Enampore Rural Council and RADZ revealed that not one piece of land in the area was allocated to an individual woman. Land holding by women was only collective, when women were organised in a group. They also discovered that the plot of land that had been allocated to them as REFECE to house their premises, as well as many other buildings in the community, like the primary school, had never been registered. The RADZ registers confirmed the existence of the national law entitling women to own land provided that they are able to make use of it. They immediately went to the Community Assistant (ASCOM) to lodge a request for the formal allocation of the land that housed their premises. Their request was approved and they now have the official certificate of land title to REFECE. In the same vein, two women researchers had the courage to seize the opportunity and ask their husbands for a piece of land so that could they carry out their agricultural activities. They were also successful.

### **Mrs. Jacqueline Biagui: 'Seizing the opportunity'**

*As soon as a team went to the rural council to discuss the problem of our land, these two women negotiated with their husbands and each one got a piece of land for her agricultural activities.*

Subsequently, the women researchers decided to undertake more systematic research and compare the actual situation with the provisions of the formal law. Training in research methods as well as planning for research implementation allowed the community women researchers to initiate the second round of their harvest of research data with optimism. After identifying four villages (two indigenous Diola villages, one indigenous Bainouk village and one village of migrants) and the relevant duty bearers in them (heads of households, rural council, customary chiefs), they divided into two groups. Following the harmonization meeting to translate the research questions, each group went to collect data from two villages.

Through individual interviews, focus group discussions and informal meetings, the women researchers returned to the fold with a basket of good data, which would help them to



Researchers interviewing a village chief

claim their right to land from the duty bearers. Allies greatly contributed to the harvest. In fact it was they who, in each target village, helped to identify key people to interview, develop a timeline for their work, and structure their focus group discussions. These allies are people who are known for their commitment to the struggle to improve women's position.

Their conclusion was that it is custom that fathers only lend rice fields to their daughters. They also discovered that there is no 'fetish' which prohibits women's access to land. The belief that land is sacred (and cannot be sold) is only adhered to in the kingdom of Mof Awi, which comprises ten villages. However, in Djibonker and in Médina, since 1980 some men had started to sell their land, and often to people from 'the outside.'

They also noted that, for the time being, women have only one benefit from the current system, namely their collective access to land – and even there, the land is owned by families and negotiation is necessary to gain access. The Law of National Domain is neither known nor applied in this area.

Women researchers also discovered that some men and youth recognise that women's access to land would contribute to improving the living conditions of their families. However, they also expressed their fears. First, they were concerned that, once economically independent, women would no longer respect their husbands. Second they were worried that, when a woman dies, other families would profit from the land, as custom allows her nephews to benefit from what is planted on her land. It should nevertheless be noted that some young men are sensitive to change and are ready to convince refractory peers about women's right to access land.

In addition, there is an on-going transition in the area from a 'two granary system' to 'one granary system' which is also having change effects on gender relations. In the 'two granaries' system, each spouse would take charge of the children for a certain period of time. The husband and the wife each support the children during parts of the year, drawing the daily pot of rice from his or her granary. However, the wife's period of responsibility is greater as it extends until the dry season and by then granaries are almost empty. The 'double granary' system resulted in competition amongst co-wives.<sup>43</sup> It also contributed to a strict gender distribution of resources.<sup>44</sup>

#### **Mrs Rosalie Manga: 'My nightmare'**

I am originally from the village of Enampore and my husband is from Badiate, one of the villages of the kingdom. As is usual, I work in the rice fields of my husband. However, as you know, under the 'two granaries' system, each spouse manages their own granary. If I have nothing in my own granary, I may die of hunger as my husband is only responsible for his granary and for feeding the children part of the year. In order to address this situation, I asked my husband to lend me a piece of land that I could plant. He accepted. I worked on these plots successfully. When, over the years, my husband realized that my income was increasing, he took the land away from me. He said that I wanted to humiliate him by showing him my power, because in our region, values such as courage and wealth (measured by the size of the rice crop) are only carried by men. [So,] I was forced to return to my birth village [for access to land], which means walking around 4 to 5 kilometres, to clear the land, plant the seed nursery, go regularly to weed it and after two months, dig up and transport the seedlings and return to Badiate to transplant them in my husband's rice field and the other plot that I borrowed.<sup>45</sup>

Parallel to these realisations, women researchers identified other problems in the area, namely that six villages of the rural community do not have any plateau land and that the village of Medina does not have sufficient plateau land. As such, there is an unequal distribution of land amongst villages.

## **Women develop strategies and arguments**

A number of the women who were interviewed thought that a change in their favour was possible. The women researchers and USOFORAL also reached the same conclusion. All the new information and knowledge they had gathered gave women the opportunity and the ability to identify strategies.

The group of women researchers had already identified institutions and people as key duty bearers, as well as the messages to be addressed to each:

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<sup>43</sup> because contributions to feeding individual children could be attributed to a specific spouse - husband or [co]wife – each mother having responsibility only for her own children.

<sup>44</sup> The two granary system is becoming less common with shifts to monogamy (the Casamance is largely Christianised), and, living in nuclear rather than extended households. The single granary system does not distinguish whose labour fills it.

<sup>45</sup> Swamp rice is planted in seedbed nurseries, and transplanted when the seedlings are larger, after the rains have begun. This reduces the need for weeding and enables salinized land to have a longer leaching period.



- When addressing their families, women would emphasise the fate of single or divorced women to justify their right to land from their birth families.
- When addressing village heads and customary chiefs, women would show that no 'fetish' prohibits their access to land, and the customary authorities should raise awareness amongst inhabitants of the advantages that will accrue to families and communities as a result of women's access to land.
- When addressing the president of the rural community, women would ask him to ensure that the Law of National Domain is applied and take applications for land by individual women seriously.

Thus, women were convinced that all these duty bearers would understand that their access to land is a major step which will ensure the improvement of their status, and enable them, as citizens, to take up their rights and responsibilities. Satisfied at having found the right arguments to use vis-à-vis different kinds of duty bearers to ensure their support for the changes requested, and after de-briefing the USOFORAL staff, the women researchers refined their strategies and decided to start with a feedback meeting with their allies, as well as the village heads and customary chiefs.

### **Women speak out and ensure the commitment of duty bearers to move towards a local charter**

The women's research group therefore planned two meetings. The first meeting would be with the village heads and a number of notables who seemed to be in favour of the change and who could be considered as 'allies.' The second meeting would include these same people in addition to the customary chiefs, as well as two experts on land and property, a local development practitioner and a representative of the district attorney.

During the first meeting with village heads and selected notables, feedback from the research results was given by two researchers, one of whom was the ASCOM agent's spouse whilst the second was the daughter of the village chief. This was followed by discussion, which was also a validation of the research, and it became clear that all those present understood the obstacles that women had identified as causes of their lack of access to land. In addition, there was a consensus amongst all those present that women's work is valuable and that it benefits their families.

Seeing that all those present recognised the impact of their work on improving the living conditions of their families, the women expressed their demand for better access to land. The surprise was that, despite this recognition, the response to the women's request for a more equitable redistribution of resources was a long silence. This silence was broken by the Deputy-President of the rural community who announced the end of the meeting.

During the second meeting, there was another surprise: one of the allies of the women turned into a fierce opponent, convinced that one should not touch or challenge traditions which stipulate that women cannot access plateau land. Luckily, there were external experts present who supported the women during the debates. The engagement of other duty bearers and opinion leaders also contributed to enriching the debates and reaffirmed for women the importance of their research. It became evident that the real allies amongst them were distinguished by their willingness to change tradition.

Women were demanding their right to access land, and the rights of their children to inherit that land. They highlighted the injustice of the current situation vis-à-vis girls and demonstrated why they should be able to inherit from their families of origin. They also put forward that fulfilling the inheritance rights of girls may contribute to resolving conflicts between villages, as children could live in their mothers' or fathers' villages, based on their choices and interests.

Interventions by these new allies really helped to create the trigger by convincing one of the leaders of the village chiefs to reconsider his initial point of view. Finally, all village leaders committed themselves to raising awareness in their communities of the desirability of facilitating women's access to land. Building on this, women slipped in the idea of a Local Charter which would allow a more just and equitable management of land. As a follow-up to the awareness raising activities proposed by village chiefs, a meeting to discuss the Charter was planned by those village leaders who had committed themselves to awareness raising. A first draft of the Charter has already been developed with the support of the local community development officer.

## Conclusion

Conventional research is often the prerogative of 'experts,' but we have learned that, in order to undertake successful research on women's access to land, it is better to transfer research competence to rural women. Rural women have effectively proven that they are best placed to identify problems related to their status. In addition, and once they finish the research, they themselves take the responsibility of using the findings to bring in necessary changes. This is what the women of the rural community of Enampore are in the process of doing successfully. In effect, the fact of publicly raising the problem of their access to land enabled the discovery that some men hide behind tradition to maintain their privileges. But it also revealed that there are others who are more reasonable and can become allies. This action research also allowed them to identify additional problems that the duty bearers promised to resolve.

It is important to underline that despite the current context of conflict, which leaves people in a situation of uncertainty, women succeeded in creating a space to claim their rights. The debate is now open and will not stop. This unusual outcome stems from the action research methodology which allowed women from the same socio-cultural zone to probe a sensitive issue: their access to plateau land. As such, women and men from

Nyassia, Adéane and Oulampane have been following the outcome of this action research with great interest.

Women from Enampore also know that in order to obtain land they will need to use the land in a productive manner [French: *mise en valeur*], and in order to do so, they need to have development support of the rural council. This support will be an integral part of the Charter which will be signed by the REFECE groups, the representative of the heads of households, and the representative of the customary chiefs. In other words, women are aware that they still need to secure their other rights so that their access to plateau land will improve their social and economic status.

The land issue is one of the main sources of the conflict in Casamance. Allocating plateau land to women can contribute to resolving this conflict. Indeed, when boys and girls can inherit the land of their fathers or their mothers, this will strengthen relations amongst different villages and communities. As a result, ultimately limited natural resources will be distributed more equitably amongst villages, and communities in the Casamance will be better protected against external interests.





# Partner organisations

## Association Songtaab-Yalgré – Burkina Faso

Association Songtaab-Yalgré (ASY) was founded in 1998 to promote the development of women's entrepreneurship for their effective integration in economic development, as well as social and cultural development. *Songtaab-Yalgré* means 'helping each other' in Mooré. ASY is the umbrella organisation of over 3,000 rural women, whose main economic activity is collecting and processing shea nuts into 'butter,' soap, body lotion, cream, lip balm, and the like, for sale.

ASY has two prongs. The first is economic programmes. Through training, mentoring, counselling, resource mobilisation and technical assistance, ASY strengthens women's management and technical capacity in micro-enterprises and small businesses. ASY also assists in direct marketing (especially internationally of certified organic shea nut products), which ensures maximum returns to the women producers. In addition, they work on securing women's access to natural resources. The second prong supports women's socio-cultural rights and development, including around health, literacy and education.

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## Clinique juridique DEME SO – Mali

DEME SO ('House of Help' in Bambara), registered in 1992, was founded to promote democracy and protect human rights in Mali, focussing on enabling grassroots communities and vulnerable groups (women, youth, prisoners, the poor) to exercise effective citizenship in rural and urban areas. The DEME SO Legal Clinic (1994) raises awareness of rights, trains paralegals, investigates abuses and provides legal advice and mediation for victims of rights violations. A specific initiative is the Women's Development Service, through which more than 60 women have been trained and are providing paralegal services in grassroots communities. It has also supported over 60 women's groups to form and work on women's economic rights (which women chose as their immediate priority), as well as in the fight against all forms of structural discrimination.

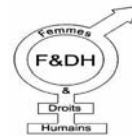
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## Femmes et Droits Humaines (FDH) – Mali

Founded in 2000, Femmes et Droits Humains (Women and Human Rights) promotes and defends women's and girls' human rights – particularly in education, economics, reproductive health and political participation. FDH supports, facilitates and strengthens women's and girls' and grassroots communities' capacities to be effective partners – influencing policy development and implementation, thus consolidating social justice and democracy. In addition to training of trainers in human rights, democracy and gender, and sexual and reproductive rights and health, FDH undertakes research and projects for women's economic development, provides counselling, and engages in lobbying and advocacy for women's human rights.

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Website: [www.fdhmali.org/](http://www.fdhmali.org/)



## Alternative Espaces Citoyens – Niger

Alternative Espaces Citoyens (Alternative Citizen Spaces) works for a society based on equality of rights, concerned with environmental preservation, youth and enhanced solidarity between peoples. Alternative uses media (print, radio and ICT) and its 'study circles' across Niger to build citizenship awareness, education, and mobilisation to promote democratic values and activism. Alternative cadres run newspapers and other publications in French and Hausa (including specialized publications for youth, and for women), and an independent radio station. Initiatives include regular public debate on budget monitoring. Alternative Espace Citoyens has been at the forefront of many social mobilisation campaigns in Niger, as well as international processes like the World and African Social Forums, partnering with Alternatives-International and civil society organisations across Africa.

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Website : [www.alternativeniger.org](http://www.alternativeniger.org)



### Association pour la Promotion de la Femme Sénégalaise APROFES – Senegal

APROFES (Association for the promotion of the Senegalese woman), was founded in 1987 from the realisation that the failure of development programmes stems from lack of support for women's concerns. It is a local organisation of women from diverse occupations, social backgrounds, races, religions and political affiliations. APROFES supports community initiatives, especially of and for women and youth, through training, education, advocacy, support for productive activities and improving quality of life. In particular APROFES focuses on women's economic empowerment, the access of women and their communities to resources (water, health, education, sanitation and means of production), and promotion of the rights of women and girls. APROFES has been at the forefront of the fight against gender-based violence in Senegal, campaigning locally in Kaolack and nationally, and providing advice and support for redress for women and girl survivors of violence. APROFES also runs a credit union and health cooperative.

#### APROFES

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Website : <http://aprofes.org/a-propos>



### Centre d'informations juridique du réseau Africain pour le développement intégré (RADI) – Senegal

The Centre for Legal Information of the African Network for Integrated Development in Senegal (RADI) was established in 1989 and has offices in Dakar and Kaolack. In order to raise awareness of legal rights and facilitate access to justice, RADI was the first organisation in Senegal to establish legal clinics in poor urban and rural areas, where information and services are provided by lawyers and a legal support network (including judges, bailiffs, doctors, law professors, psychologists, etc.). RADI's capacity building (training and support, campaigns and so on) with community paralegals, women's groups, youth groups and community-based organisations are aimed to ensure their sustainability – that is, continued operation and effectiveness with minimal intervention from RADI.

#### Centre d'informations juridique, Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré

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## **USOFORAL / Comite régional de solidarité des femmes pour la paix en Casamance – Senegal**

The Regional Solidarity Committee of Women for Peace in Casamance (CRSFPC), also known as USOFORAL ('let's unite' in Diola), was founded in 1999 to involve women fully in community life and peace-building in this conflict-torn region. USOFORAL works to build women's leadership and organisations to participate effectively in the realisation of peace. USOFORAL's membership has a strong rural base, which has set up local peace committees and worked to put peace education into practice. USOFORAL also aims to develop women's social and economic status, with strong women's organisations accessing financial and technical resources to support their own initiatives for economic and political empowerment.

Comite régional de solidarité des femmes pour la paix en Casamance / USOFORAL

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