

From market gardens to fish farms, assessing a project's impact on the lives of people along the inner delta of the Niger River

Following a long history of cooperation, NIRAS continues to support Sweden in its work to promote the sustainable management of natural resources in Mali.



Tenenkou Women's Association, Kawral Toguel. Photo by Aly Backa Konaté.



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For more than 20 years, Sweden has been applying official development aid (ODA) in an effort to curb climate change, particularly in the world's poorest countries. In a recent independent [evaluation](#) of Sida's natural resource and climate interventions in Mali, the Expert Group for Aid Studies – a Swedish Government committee that analyses the country's ODA – pointed to several programmes that have proven to be successful and scalable to other parts of the globe.

Sida's support to Mali in building climate change resilience and adaptation continues, and many elements of its earlier interventions – such as the Decentralised Forest Management Programme (GEDEFOR) – are being replicated in related projects today. Leveraging our experience of providing technical assistance to the implementation of GEDEFOR from 2009 to 2013, NIRAS is helping to ensure the effective use of resources in one particularly complex programme: the Sustainable Development Programme for the Inner Delta of the Niger River (PDD DIN II), which runs from 2017 to 2022.

With support from Sida through the Embassy of Sweden in Bamako, the Malian Department of Forestry is implementing PDD DIN II via a Project Management Unit (PMU) bolstered by regional coordinators and site-specific focal points. The programme works with natural resources and biodiversity, weaving together environmental protection with the crucial social aspects of governance, poverty and conflict reduction, food security, and inclusivity. PDD DIN II operates in vast regions of semi-arid Mali, conflict-affected zones with relatively weak infrastructure but also environmentally unique ones as the inner Niger delta is the second largest wetland in Africa (second only to Okavango, Botswana) and a designated site under the [RAMSAR convention](#).

Tree plantations, latrines and poultry farms: the impact is visible on the ground

Due to its large geographical scope, the potential of PDD DIN II to create significant impact is high, but equally the programme's spread over a vast area makes it difficult to monitor independently. To this end, the NIRAS team has helped develop a monitoring and evaluation manual for the PMU and conducted its own field trips far up the Niger River to look into the results of the programme and how it affects the daily lives of Malian people.

24

villages visited to discuss with service providers, cooperatives, associations, farmers, and local administration and leaders

Over the course of last year, NIRAS's national monitoring expert visited a total of 24 villages in three regions along the inner Niger river delta (Ségou, Mopti and Timbuktu). Meeting with local leaders, farmers, service providers, associations, and agricultural cooperatives, we found that PDD-DIN II is supporting a lot of practical work, for example, the development of market gardens, tree plantations for wood and fruit, and river bank protection with improved and sustainable methods. The programme also assists with hardware and infrastructure such as the development of poultry and fish farms, latrines and cookstoves. Many beneficiaries expressed great satisfaction with the activities, which they found to be relevant to their needs.

Donor

Sida (under the Sida Framework Agreement for Agriculture, Employment and Market Development)

Client

Embassy of Sweden in Mali

Location

Inner Niger Delta region of Mali

Programme budget

€10M (€9M from Sida and €1M from Mali Government)

TA value

€213,155

Duration

2017–2022



Wafakoye Lonko. Photo by Aly Backa Konaté.



The site visits also exposed areas for improvement, both in terms of the actual infrastructure hardware but also the soft skills of users. In addition to training on how to upgrade and use the infrastructure, interviews with beneficiaries and local leaders pointed to practical areas where more support could be given, such as soil conservation and forest plantation and management. The visits also exposed some aspects of programme management and coordination that could be more effective, and these have been shared with the implementation team in the form of recommendations targeted at the overarching PMU level, regional coordinators, focal points, service providers and beneficiaries.

1 million

people live on the resources of the Niger delta ecosystems

Listening, learning, adapting

In reaction to the observations made by the NIRAS team, the project has reviewed and made adjustments to its management and monitoring routines. NIRAS is offering support on how the processes can be more transparent, streamlined and strengthened. Linking the impartial accounts from previous field missions to the overall project setup will allow the programme to be adaptive in its approach and focus on results. Plans for upcoming follow-up missions are already being prepared and discussed.

In parallel with this work, NIRAS will be conducting external monitoring of GEDEFOR, which is entering its third phase. Considered highly successful, GEDEFOR was upscaled and the third phase budget is about eight times larger than that of the first phase. In this programme, Sida supports the Ministry of Environment, Sanitation and Sustainable Development (MEADD) in the decentralised administration of forest resources and improving environmentally friendly value chains such as bee-keeping, livestock breeding, gardening and cashew nut farming.

NIRAS thus looks forward to continuing our work with the Embassy of Sweden and our technical support and advice to natural resource management well into 2020 and beyond.



Management association committee meeting. Photo by Aly Backa Konaté.