

Making decentralisation work

This ambitious title – Making Decentralisation Work (MDW) – refers to a new policy oriented research and capacity building programme recently begun by IIED's Drylands programme. The primary objectives are to provide support to the decentralisation processes currently underway in the Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, with a view to promoting more equitable, sustainable, and effective management and use of natural resources, on which so many drylands people continue to rely. The programme aims to add value to a broad range of ongoing initiatives through building alliances, strengthening of networks, and identifying gaps where IIED and its West African collaborators can make significant impact.

With generous funding from the Danish and Swedish governments, the first nine months of the MDW programme have been spent in a series of preparatory activities, consultation exercises, a sub-regional workshop on influencing the policy process, and national workshops in each of the four countries, from which plans for the forthcoming year have been developed.

The work programme consists of three main activities. The first – *Empowering local people* – builds on the extensive experience of Senegalese NGO Associates for Research in Education for Development (ARED) in the domain of adult literacy. Over the past six years, ARED has designed and tested training materials in the Pulaar language on a broad range of topics which provide local communities with the skills and confidence to participate in a more informed and effective manner in the decentralisation process in Senegal. Within the context of the MDW programme, ARED will

focus on two areas of work:

- consolidating its experience in Senegal by developing specific training materials to help marginal communities (e.g. pastoral groups) participate more fully in the processes that have an impact on their livelihoods, and
- initiating a process for the spread of these methods to other Sahelian countries.

The second activity – *Building participatory institutions* – builds on the work carried out over the last three years in Senegal and Burkina Faso on the setting up and strengthening of learning groups to examine the barriers to participatory natural management within governmental and non-governmental organisations. Learning groups working at local and district level have initiated and supported research and training activities, as well as stimulated dialogue and exchange between the many different actors working at these levels. Strong collaborative links have been built with other institutions involved in participatory natural management and decentralisation, in order to facilitate joint learning and the emergence of stronger partnerships between a range of different groups. Specific activities of these groups include setting up mechanisms for greater participation by farmer organisations in the decentralisation process, developing the planning and negotiation capacities of local communities in order to strengthen their power to influence policies, and finding ways to support greater involvement by women in local decision-making. IIED Sahel is coordinating this programme of work.

The third activity – *Action-research informing policy* – was launched with the sub-regional workshop 'Strengthening the capacity for analysis and influencing policy on decentralisation and

