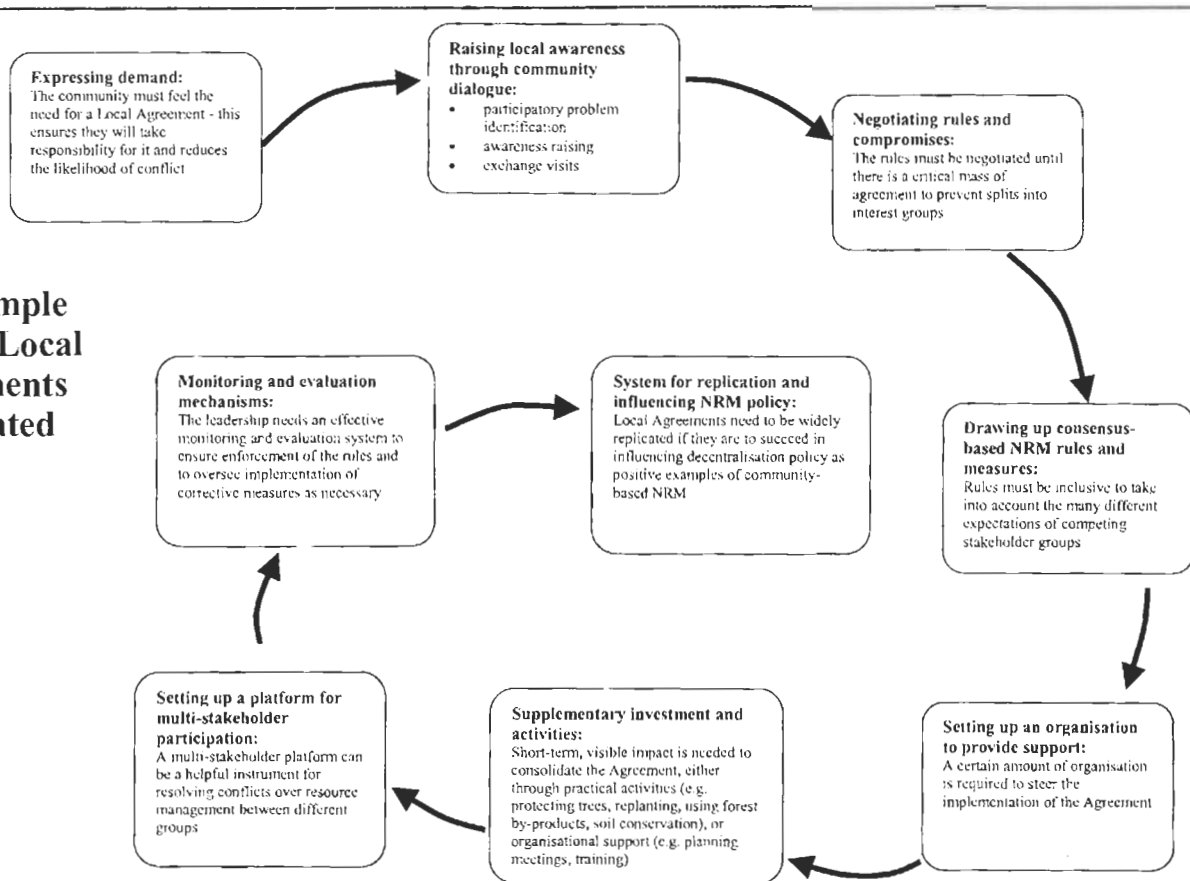


An example of how Local Agreements are created



The impact of Local Agreements

Local Agreements have an impact in four key areas:

Institutional and political impact: Local Agreements establish a dialogue between a range of stakeholders, including government administration, elected local authorities, CBOs and NGOs and help to foster joint governance for NRM. The process of establishing a Local Agreement results in the creation or strengthening of local institutions to monitor and implement it. These institutions often mediate between the extension services and other local organisations on environmental issues.

Economic benefits: improved NRM can lead to income diversification (through for example gathering of forest products, crafts, eco-tourism, small enterprise) and can result in substantial economic benefits. For instance, in 1997 gathered produce sold at the weekly market in Toubatoul, Senegal, generated FCFA 21 million for local communities.

Enhanced social cohesion: building on existing and traditional NRM mechanisms in the creation of a Local Agreement strengthens local knowledge and reinforces social ties. This can enhance social cohesion and help create ways of dealing with future conflicts.

Conservation of biodiversity: Local Agreements protect biodiversity through the management of natural resources. The most visible impact thus far has been the regeneration of tree and shrub cover, and the restoration of soil eroded by the wind. Soil fertility has also improved thanks to the re-growth of the nitrogen-fixing *Acacia albida*. Improved soil conservation also encourages water retention at waterholes and reduces further wind erosion.



Local Agreements facilitate a broad overview of land management, bringing together different sectors such as fishing and riverbank development.

Local Agreements in the Sahel: issues and challenges

In spite of this encouraging picture, a number of challenges remain. In some countries, the legal basis of Local Agreements remains vague and their compliance with existing legislation cannot be taken for granted. At the same time, some groups may not consider themselves bound by the Agreement and may refuse to accept the penalties. Others may exploit the right to apply penalties to the detriment of other groups. Enforcing verbal, as opposed to written, Agreements can be particularly problematic.

In a context of decentralisation Local Agreements offer great potential for sustainable NRM. If they are to become part of the legal process, however, their scope must be broadened to the level of the Commune (municipality) and they must be ratified by the Rural Council. This scaling up poses a considerable challenge for the effectiveness of Local Agreements.

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