



SAHEL & CENTRAL AFRICA

ENVIRONMENTAL MEDIATION: PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES THROUGH COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

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Centre for
Humanitarian
Dialogue

Mediation for peace

SUMMARY

While the exploitation of natural resources is essential to the survival of African communities, environmental challenges and climate change are increasingly exacerbating local tensions, particularly in relation to resource-sharing. This situation intensifies conflicts among different resource users such as farmers, herders and others, thereby making efforts to maintain peace more difficult. This reality becomes even more acute in the event of surrounding armed conflicts, when communities seek support or protection from armed actors.

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) has developed an approach aimed at preventing and resolving local environmental conflicts through mediation. These efforts aim to mitigate the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict on civilians, secure access to basic services and/or strengthen the environmental resilience of communities. Since 2015, HD has facilitated more than 110 agreements in Francophone Africa, including 37 specifically preventing or addressing environmental challenges.

The outcomes of the mediation processes demonstrate that these agreements not only help to resolve conflicts but also to protect natural resources and adapt community practices for more sustainable resource exploitation. By strengthening local resilience, these initiatives encourage the autonomous resolution of disputes and the establishment of effective monitoring mechanisms. In addition, affected populations become aware of their role in resource preservation, which leads them to take ownership of their commitments. This approach, based on the involvement of local actors and the search for endogenous solutions, is proving to be a powerful lever for ensuring lasting and sustainable peace.





The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) works to prevent and resolve armed conflicts around the world through mediation and quiet diplomacy. An impartial and independent organisation, HD has been promoting peace around the world since 1999 by helping parties in conflict to find common ground and reach agreements. Working at all levels, from international to local, HD brings together governments, opposition parties, armed groups and communities, including women and young people, to help people build lasting peace and a better future.

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Illustrations by [Dramane Diarra](#), a Malian artist from Bamako. The four drawings illustrate four pictures of the mediation process facilitated by HD in Kouoro, Mali.

INTRODUCTION

The exploitation of natural resources and subsistence farming are essential to the survival of a significant proportion of Africa's population.¹ In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, an estimated 57% of the population² depend on these activities for their livelihoods. Communities are particularly vulnerable to climate instability, as the continent faces numerous environmental challenges such as soil degradation, deforestation and loss of biodiversity.³ In this context, climate change is an aggravating factor that weakens African agrosystems.⁴ West, Central and East African regions appear to be the most vulnerable, especially as insecurity and political and economic instability further compound their fragility.⁵ This, in turn, greatly increases the risk of local conflicts, particularly over the sharing of natural resources.⁶ In such conditions, achieving and maintaining peace becomes increasingly difficult.

Mediation can play a crucial role in preventing and resolving these conflicts over natural resources, especially at the local level. Environmental mediation, or environmental peace-making, can be understood as a set of practices that include, use and frame the environment as an entry point for, and an element of, peace mediation, dialogue and negotiation. It can generate positive results both in terms of peace-making and environmental protection⁷.

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) has made environmental and climate-related mediation an objective of its institutional strategy.⁸ In line with this commitment, the organisation seeks to share insights from 37 environmental mediation processes conducted across Francophone Africa.⁹ This publication examines the challenges faced by local actors at the heart of these processes and highlights the solutions they can offer. In particular, it demonstrates that by pursuing endogenous and collaborative approaches, conflict parties can secure sustainable access to vital resources and prevent future conflicts linked to environmental issues. In doing so, **environmental mediation not only helps to strengthen communities' ability to adapt to climate shocks and conflicts but also contributes to restoring lasting peace.**

1. The many faces of environmental conflict

For over a decade, HD has been mediating conflicts in eleven Francophone Africa countries. An analysis of these conflicts, where the organisation has been mandated to intervene, reveals that environmental issues often crystallise around the sharing of natural resources – frequently constituting the primary source of local conflict. **Out of 110 mediation processes conducted**

1. Action Contre la Faim. (2018). *Sahel: A chronic and multifaceted pastoral crisis* [Report]. Action Contre la Faim.

https://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ACF_Rapport_Sahel_12p_web.pdf

2. World Bank. (n.d.). Rural population (% of total). <https://donnees.banquemondiale.org/indicateur/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=ZG>

3. African Union. (n.d.). Soil Initiative Framework for Africa [Document]. African Union.

https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/43778-doc-Soil_Initiative_Framework_for_Africa_F.pdf

4. Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'École Militaire (IRSEM) & Observatoire Défense et Climat. (2023). *Sources of conflict in the world* [Note].

https://defenseclimat.fr/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Note_Foyers-conflits_monde_FR-1.pdf

5. *Ibidem*

6. UNESCO. (s.d.). *Climate change threatens new conflicts*. *The UNESCO Courier*.

<https://courier.unesco.org/fr/articles/avec-le-changement-climatique-la-menace-de-nouveaux-conflits>

7. The broader concept in English is called 'Environmental Peacebuilding', with 'Environmental Peacemaking' as a sub-category used by HD (see Kratzer and Hillert (2022), *Operationalizing Environmental Peacemaking: Perspectives on integrating the environment into peacemaking*).

8. <https://hdcentre.org/insights/hds-global-strategy-2024-2027/>

9. Mediation on environmental issues in French-speaking Africa is part of HD's growing global portfolio of mediation and dialogue processes incorporating an environmental and climate dimension.



by HD in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Togo, the Central African Republic and Chad between 2015 and January 2025, 55 dealt with issues of access to or sharing of natural resources.

In these contexts, HD has worked to support the parties both in their pursuit of peace and in promoting more sustainable management of natural resources. The dialogues between the conflicting parties allowed consensus building but required a careful distinction between the various underlying sources of tension.

Degraded and unequally distributed resources

Resource degradation and unequal access to those resources among the involved parties are frequently key drivers of conflict. Such is the case in Niger, where, in the Diffa region, communities of Mahamid Arab herders and Kanuri farmers have clashed over the sharing of pastoral and agricultural resources. The Kanuri accused the Mahamid Arabs – who moved to the region in the 1990s – of damaging the oasis basins they used for vegetable farming and grazing. Similarly, in Chad, the failure to properly preserve Liwa natron (a widely used resource rich in a mineral substance composed of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate) led to clashes between cattle breeders, natron sellers and farmers. In Togo, land impoverishment and land hoarding are leading to conflicts over the control of fertile land between groups considered as indigenous and those viewed as non-indigenous.

Conflict exacerbated by the deteriorating security situation

Population movements also have a major impact on conflicts over the sharing of natural resources, particularly those linked to agropastoral activities. The influx of several hundreds or thousands of people and their livestock into areas unaccustomed to accommodate such large numbers, and therefore ill-equipped, often leads to resource degradation driven by the sharp increase in users. In Burkina Faso, for example, the security instability resulting from the conflict between the state and armed jihadist groups has triggered large-scale internal population movements towards urban centres.

As the displaced populations and their hosts do not necessarily share the same practices and customs when it comes to exploiting natural resources, tensions and conflicts arise. In addition, pressure on available resources increases, especially when people move with their livestock or engage in unregulated land cultivation. In this context – where livelihoods are increasingly under threat – it is essential to identify new, sustainable approaches to preserving natural resources and the environment.

In central Mali, **conflicts involving defence and security forces, hunters' self-defence militias and armed jihadist groups**, in many areas, resulted in farmers being denied access to their fields, or to large-scale cattle rustling, prompting transhumant herders to seek alternative routes. Similarly, in the Niger River Valley in Mali, conflicts have had a direct impact on the environment, with armed actors reportedly starting bush fires, using firearms – whether intentionally or unintentionally. These bushfires can lead to the destruction of local ecosystems, as well as a further reduction in fodder availability in an area where these resources are already scarce. Furthermore, the migration of herders to other areas often overloads the available grazing land. This, in turn, fuels tensions between non-native herders and local communities seeking to protect their livelihoods.

Climate change as an aggravating factor in conflicts over natural resources

Distinguishing the role of climate change within this complex picture is not easy, particularly when multiple, interrelated drivers of conflict are at play. Nevertheless, it is evident that in situations where one of the causes of conflict is the sharing of natural resources, climate change often plays a role in escalating tensions.

« We pride ourselves on our *néré* and shea forests, so we must protect them ».

A representative of the Regional Reconciliation Support Team (ERAR) in Sikasso, Mali



HD's experience shows that **the links between climate change and armed conflict are multiple and complex**. The scarcity of resources as a result of climate change results in increased competition between different resource users, which can lead to conflict.¹⁰ Moreover, academic research has shown that climate change contributes to the proliferation of armed groups and violent extremism. It also increases the risk of tension and conflict through its impact on human mobility, including internal displacement, seasonal migration and transhumance.¹¹ In northern Mali, for instance, the presence of armed jihadist groups has prompted widespread displacement of livestock breeders who, along with their animals, are seeking refuge in more secure municipalities. This influx places additional pressure on local resources, particularly as increasingly irregular rainy season cycles, as well as years of poor rainfall, have significantly reduced the availability of pasture. As a result, conflict between herders and other resource users is escalating.

In West and Central Africa, where cross-border transhumance is rooted in traditional practices, many livestock farmers have had to review their transhumance routes due to a range of factors – including insecurity, restrictions on cross-border movements, and the obstruction of transhumance corridors – with climate change playing a significant role. Seasonal variations, with more frequent droughts, are affecting animal mobility.¹² These changes in seasons have led to overlaps between harvest periods and transhumance calendars, resulting in tense and sometimes, violent interactions between farmers and herders. This

10. Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'École Militaire (IRSEM) & Observatoire Défense et Climat. (2023). Sources of conflict in the world [Note].

https://defenseclimat.fr/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Note_Foyers-conflits_monde_FR-1.pdf

11. African Union, & Weathering Risk. (2023). Climate Security Risk Assessment in Africa (pp. 110-113). Weathering Risk.

https://weatheringrisk.org/sites/default/files/document/ACRA_FR_Full%20Report_0.pdf

12. International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2023). Pastoral Mobility in the Context of Climate Change: The Case of Mali. Geneva: IOM. <https://publications.iom.int/books/mobilite-pastorale-dans-le-contexte-du-changement-climatique-le-cas-du-mali>

was the case in southern Chad where, in 2024, the harvest in the municipality of Goré was delayed. As a result, transhumant herders arrived with their animals before the farmers had completed the harvest. The destruction of crops by the animals triggered fatal clashes between the two groups.

Niger offers another example where communities were fighting over access to the ponds of the Dallol Maouri (part of which is protected by the Ramsar Convention).¹³ Since 2016, the banks of the Dallol Maouri, traditionally used for farming and grazing, have experienced sudden and persistent flooding. In response, some farmers who had previously relied on rain-fed agriculture shifted to irrigation, thus establishing a more permanent presence in the area. To prevent conflicts between farmers and herders due to the reduction in available grazing land, a municipal by-law was adopted in October 2016. The law set specific dates by which the fields must be vacated and prohibited access and grazing on the Dallol Maouri plain. However, some herders did not comply with the ban, claiming that they had not been consulted when the decision was taken. Conflicts between farmers and transhumant herders therefore arose regularly, particularly following incidents of crop destruction by livestock.

2. Ensuring sustainable peace by taking environmental issues into account when mediating local agreements

Conflicts over access to or the sharing of natural resources, if left unmanaged, can escalate into violent – and sometimes fatal – confrontations, mass population displacements or prolonged, almost irreversible degradation of the disputed resources. **This is where the role of the mediator becomes essential, as they can help to prevent such conflicts and facilitate their resolution.**

In Francophone Africa, HD has been providing parties with its mediation services to prevent or resolve environmental conflicts at the local level since 2015.¹⁴ Since then, HD has facilitated over 55 agreements involving the sharing of natural resources, 37 of which specifically focus on the prevention or resolution of environmental conflicts. All of these agreements have been implemented and respected by the parties.

Prevention of environmental conflict

These mediation processes are initiated at the request of the parties involved, when access to and the use of specific natural resources are sources of tension between users, or when those resources have been seriously degraded. **They take place before violent conflicts arise or when retaliatory measures restricting access to or the use of natural resources by one or more groups of users are adopted.**

These processes can lead to the adoption of either oral or written agreements. Oral agreements may take the form of seasonal resource management mechanisms, such as calen-

13. Ramsar Convention Secretariat. (n.d.). Official website of the Convention on Wetlands. <https://www.ramsar.org/fr>

14. HD's expertise is based on more than 10 years' experience of mediating local conflicts in the Sahel, the Central African Republic and Togo. This local mediation methodology is described in more detail in a 2021 publication: <https://hdcentre.org/insights/conflict-in-the-sahel-the-benefits-and-limits-of-local-mediation/>

“We have understood that we are the real players in the protection of natural resources.”

A representative of the local authorities of Kouoro, Mali

dars restricting access to resources to certain users. For example, in Mali, HD facilitated the adoption of calendars for the arrival and departure of livestock from pastures in the Ansongo area. This was done to limit the simultaneous influx of animals and allow the increasingly scarce pastures to regenerate.

In other cases, these processes require a written formalisation of rules for accessing and using natural resources. These may take the form of local agreements,¹⁵ which clearly define the rules for accessing and using a natural resource. These local agreements typically also outline a clear system for monitoring and enforcing compliance, including the establishment of management bodies responsible for implementing and enforcing the agreement, and imposing sanctions in case of violations by users. To ensure alignment with applicable legislation, these agreements must be developed in collaboration with the state’s decentralised technical services (such as those in charge of rural water supply, forest management, etc.).

More rarely, the mediator assists the local authorities in revising legislation that regulates access to certain resources. This was the case in the Mopti district in Mali, where HD supported the Prefecture in 2021 in revising the decree governing access by livestock farmers to rice-growing residues.

Resolution of environmental conflicts

It is important to emphasise that environmental conflicts regularly take on identity-related dimensions. Ethnic fault lines can hinder dialogue, with each side accusing the other of colluding with armed actors. Members of certain professional groups can also sometimes be stigmatised and, whether justified or not, links may be drawn, for example, between pastoralism, crime and jihadism. This is particularly evident in the Sahel, where there is a broader conflict taking place between the authorities and armed groups that makes negotiations between the parties more difficult.

The fundamentally environmental nature of the mediation process remains central, even when other underlying issues are present. **Environmental issues are often used as an entry point for negotiations to ease tensions in the dialogue.** For example, in Niger, during a violent conflict between transhumant herders and sedentary farming communities living near the Dallol Maouri, the negotiations focused on access to and the protection of the shared natural resource. This approach made it possible to place environmental issues back at the forefront, allowing the parties to initially avoid the more sensitive issues associated with the stigmatisation of certain communities. **By centring the mediation on resource access, the discussions became more objective and less emotionally**

15. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) (2022). Natural Resources Management in the Sahel: Uses and Customs at the Service of Conflict Resolution. HD. <https://hdcentre.org/insights/natural-resources-management-in-the-sahel-uses-and-customs-at-the-service-of-conflict-resolution/>

charged, opening space for dialogue between the parties that might otherwise have been blocked by deep-rooted issues linked to identity. Indirectly, the environmental mediation process helps to rebuild trust and gradually dismantle stereotypes, even when these issues were not explicitly addressed.

Once formalised in writing, the compromises reached by the parties take the form of Agreements or Commitments for Peace. These may be preceded by confidence-building measures whose more limited scope helps to pave the way for a broader peace agreement. The agreements specify the measures to be taken to ensure the peaceful access to or sharing of natural resources. While they do not put in place a formal system of sanctions or a resource management body, they lead to the establishment of an Agreement Monitoring Committee.

The success of environmental mediation: the resilience of local

Some examples of provisions in HD-facilitated agreements demonstrating the commitment of the parties to adapt their practices, with a view to protecting the natural resources they rely on

Local Management Agreement for the Agofou Waterhole straddling the communes of Hombori/Mopti and Gossi/Tombouctou, Mali - January 2021

Article 9: The use of pesticides or any other product that may cause damage to other resources, animals or crops is strictly prohibited. Persons or organisations engaging in such practices will be severely punished by the Waterhole Management Authorities.

Local Management Agreement for the Use of Natron, commune of Liwa, Lake province, Chad - June 2021

Article 1: The pond and its resources are the only legacy left to us by our parents. We have an obligation to maintain and protect them in order to leave them as legacy to our children. Rational and consensual management, in accordance with our culture and customs, is a guarantee of the sustainability of these resources.

Commitments to Prevent Conflicts over Natural Resources in the commune of Kouoro, Sikasso region, Mali - December 2023

Article 3: No abusive cutting of green wood, no uncontrolled cutting of dead wood, no picking of unripe wild fruits and no planting of crops in animal corridors; Supporting technical services and local authorities in protecting the environment and combating deforestation by complying with the laws in force.

Conflict Prevention Agreement between the Haoussa and Peulh communities of the Guéchémé commune through peaceful management of the Dallol Maouri plain, Dosso region, Niger - April 2024

Article 4: Comply with the schedule for clearing fields established annually and by consensus by the authorities, make communities aware of the need to respect passage corridors, fence off vegetable gardens and refrain from letting animals graze in the Dallol Maouri protected area.

The success of these environmental mediation initiatives is based on their iterative and inclusive nature, including in terms of follow-up. HD ensures that mediation processes are not rushed to allow the parties to find endogenous solutions to resolve their differences. Recognising that tensions and conflicts often stem from degradation or depletion of natural resources, communities are acutely aware that their livelihoods depend on the sustainability of these same resources. HD thus, supports them throughout the mediation process to develop mutually acceptable solutions that respect the parties' ecological needs and knowledge. During the mediation process, the parties often showcase their existing sustainable practices, suggest ways of improving them, and work toward more balanced decision-making in resource management.

The Agreement Monitoring Committees and the Local Agreement Management Bodies play a key role in ensuring that the commitments defined by the parties are respected and implemented. HD supports these bodies in fulfilling their missions by facilitating meetings between their members and by providing continuous advice. The impact of the 37 Agreements has been particularly significant, and initial observations indicate that:

➔ They help **adapt the use of the resource to ensure** they are exploited peacefully. In other words, where violence has previously erupted over resource use, mediation not only helps to reduce tensions but also enables more cooperative management. The capacity communities gain to manage their disputes amicably also serves to prevent future conflicts, especially in the face of climatic shocks (such as floods or droughts) or security shocks (such as military operations or the territorial expansion of non-state armed groups), that temporarily increase the pressure on available resources.

Excerpt from the Local Management Agreement for the Use of Natron, municipality of Liwa, Lake province, Chad - June 2021

Article 1 : The pond and its resources are the only legacy left to us by our parents. We have an obligation to maintain and protect them in order to leave them as legacy to our children.
Rational and consensual management, in accordance with our culture and customs, is a guarantee of the sustainability of these resources.

For example, in 2019, in Mali's Timbuktu region, HD supported a mediation process in the municipalities of Alafia, Doukeire and Salam, which successfully led to prevention of conflicts over resource sharing. The Agreement Monitoring Committee quickly became self-sufficient. When in 2022, the waters of the Niger River rose, posing a serious threat to local rice-growing areas, the Committee was able to manage the resulting tensions between resource users amicably, and without HD's support.

In 2022 in the Niger River Valley in the Gao region of northern Mali, HD supported a mediation process aimed at preventing conflicts among pastoral communities. Due to insufficient rainfall, a toxic weed known as *acheb* began to proliferate in the region's heavily used pastures. As herders competed for access to areas where *acheb* was absent, tensions escalated. An initial mediation process resulted in the decision to prohibit access to pastures where *acheb* was proliferating until it withered, thereby preventing further conflicts. Encouraged by the success of this initial effort, the parties involved approached HD again in 2023 – this time to jointly develop Entry and Exit Calendars for the main grazing areas. This proactive approach helped prevent overgrazing when large numbers of livestock breeders, fleeing violence and cattle theft by armed groups, arrived in the area. The renewed initiative reflects a strong commitment by the stakeholders to adapt their practices in order to preserve local resources. The new grazing schedules have since been respected by all parties, successfully preventing conflicts.

➔ They help **protect degraded resources and facilitate the regeneration of ecosystems** by encouraging resource users to change their behaviour. The pressure on resources is thus reduced, as the parties adopt measures such as reforestation initiatives, cultivation and harvesting calendars, and restricted access to certain areas. These practices promote more sustainable and rational use of natural resources, while also enabling their regeneration and long-term preservation.

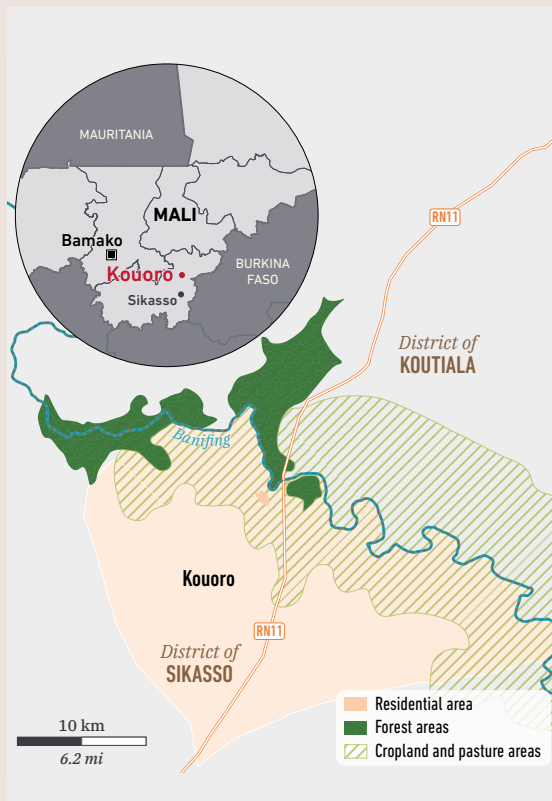
For instance, following the mediation process that led to the Agofou Local Convention, facilitated by HD in 2021 in Mali, compliance with the management rules defined consensually by the parties played a key role in restoring the local environment. This included the regeneration of pastures, the return of certain migratory bird species that had disappeared from the area, and the adaptation of fishing techniques to address the silting of the local pond.

➔ They **prevent tensions or a deterioration in the situation, enabling communities to concentrate on implementing adaptation measures.**

More broadly, environmental mediation helps prevent tensions or conflicts from escalating or flaring up again by relying on the resilience of local communities. This is made possible primarily due to the Agreement Monitoring Committees composed of representatives from the parties. For example, in the Tillabéri region of Niger, HD supported an initial mediation process in the Banibangou department to resolve a conflict rooted in issues of rural land access and exacerbated by the presence of armed actors. The successful resolution of this conflict brought about tangible peace dividends: such as the resumption of economic activities, increased engagement from technical and financial partners to support local development, and the gradual return of displaced persons. Inspired by these positive outcomes, the neighbouring communities of Ouallam expressed a desire to also engage in a peace process. This expansion of mediation from Banibangou to Ouallam was made possible through the involvement of the Banibangou Monitoring Committee and the willingness of the communities to set aside their differences and change their behaviour to work toward a sustainable peace. Thanks to the ongoing efforts of the Monitoring Committees to imple-

ment local agreements and manage any disputes between the parties amicably, former conflicts have given way to cooperation and mutual understanding, allowing communities to turn their attention toward building a more stable future.

3. The Kouoro mediation case



Mali has faced land degradation for several decades, driven by both climatic factors (such as increasingly irregular rainfall since the 1970s) and human activities (including demographic pressure and the over-exploitation of natural resources).¹⁶ This situation threatens food security and increases the vulnerability of the population, which is predominantly rural and heavily dependent on agriculture and other primary sector activities.¹⁷ Deforestation, exacerbated by the exploitation of wood and charcoal, resulted in the loss of 3,790 ha of forest between 2001 and 2021.¹⁸

In the municipality of Kouoro (Sikasso region), the growing scarcity of natural resources has caused increasing tensions between farming, pastoral and fishing communities, exacerbated by the mass influx of climate-displaced people since the droughts of the 1970s and 80s. An initial Local Agreement on the Management of Natural Resources was put in place in 2003, but it became obsolete in 2007 due to a lack of compliance with the established rules.

The situation deteriorated further in 2020, when a security crisis led to the arrival of new waves of displaced persons, intensifying the pressure on already scarce resources and causing conflict. The abusive felling of protected trees, the degradation of the banks of the Banifing River and unchecked sand extraction further worsened the situation. In June 2023, local women organised demonstrations to protest against the destruction of resources vital to their livelihoods.

In response to this crisis, local authorities initiated a mediation process, supported by HD, to draw up a new agreement. After seven months of consultations with various stakeholders, a new agreement was signed on December 22, 2023, to prevent conflicts and better manage the municipality's natural resources.

An Agreement Monitoring Committee was established to oversee the implementation of the Agreement and manage any remaining disputes between the parties amicably. Composed of

16. Ministry of the Environment, Sanitation and Sustainable Development of Mali (2020). Rapport National « NDT » Mali. Programme de Définition des Cibles Nationales de la Neutralité de Dégradation des Terres (PDC/NDT). https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/ldn_targets/2020-03/Mali%20LDN%20TSP%20Country%20Report%20_0.pdf

17. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2022. Integrated Environmental Assessment of Mali. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-01/Mali%20EEI%20Report_18122022-4.pdf

18. Global Forest Watch (n.d.). Tableau de bord du Mali. <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/country/MLI/>

25 members – including eight women – appointed by consensus by the parties, the Monitoring Committee has become a central actor in conserving the resources of the Kouoro Forest and preventing conflicts between different resource users.

Since the signing of the agreement, local communities have begun to change their practices. Notably, there has been a reduction in the cutting of wood for charcoal production and firewood collection for commercial purposes. This shift has been made possible thanks to the resilience of the Kouoro communities, who established patrols composed of traditional hunters and members of the Monitoring Committee. These patrols are supported by the introduction of a system of sanctions to enforce compliance. The Monitoring Committee has also decided to demarcate a 50-metre buffer zone along the banks of the Banifing River. Within this area it is forbidden to grow crops or cut wood. The aim of this measure is to encourage soil regeneration and biodiversity. The commitment of the female members of the Monitoring Committee has been particularly noteworthy. Through their efforts, the women's associations of shea and néré pickers have mobilised to raise community awareness of the importance of preventing abusive wood cutting, and respecting the timetables set by the municipality for picking shea and néré.

However, these adaptation measures have incurred economic costs for the communities, particularly for women, who are primarily responsible for collecting firewood. To comply with the new rules, they are now restricted to gathering only dead wood, which is in limited supply. In addition, the communities of Kouoro are facing challenges from people from outside the municipality who access the area to cut wood or extract sand from the riverbanks for resale in other localities. Although these activities are illegal, local residents often feel powerless to intervene.

To reinforce the work of the Monitoring Committee, HD continues to provide advisory support and assists its members in holding coordination meetings. The municipality is actively looking for partners who can strengthen its development to provide new sources of income for communities whose means of subsistence have dwindled, and to support reforestation efforts. For instance, the women of Kouoro have expressed a need for the construction of a centre dedicated to processing local shea and néré products. The communities have also identified priorities such as the development of an irrigated market-gardening area or a 50-hectare artificial lake to provide a permanent water reservoir for developing other agricultural activities, such as rice cultivation. Ultimately, the sustainable regeneration of Kouoro's natural resources depends on the long-term commitment of both the Agreement Monitoring Committee and the local authorities.

Discover in image the Kouoro mediation case





Conclusion

The African continent is facing numerous climate-related challenges that are exacerbating pressure on natural resources and, in turn, fuelling conflicts over their use and access. HD has developed specialised **expertise in environmental mediation**, particularly in Francophone Africa, focusing on the management of local disputes linked to the access to and sharing of natural resources. The mediation processes facilitated by HD **aim to reduce conflict resulting from the degradation, over-exploitation or depletion of natural resources in a context marked by both climate change and insecurity**.

The agreements facilitated through HD's mediation efforts lead to the adoption of new approaches to resource management that prioritise sustainable use. Rather than simply coordinating the exploitation of already strained resources – which could lead to further degradation¹⁹ – these agreements aim to protect and conserve natural assets, thereby reducing the risk of renewed conflict and reinforcing community resilience. This dual objective ensures **that local communities can continue to draw their livelihoods from these resources while safeguarding their long-term sustainability**.

HD is committed to expanding its environmental mediation portfolio in Francophone Africa and globally by exploring innovative methodologies, such as supporting conservation organisations in mediating conflicts with local communities around protected areas.

19. Hillert, L. (2023). Linking Conservation and Peacemaking. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.
<https://hdcentre.org/fr/insights/linking-conservation-and-peacemaking-hd-research-report/>