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West African Borders and Integration

CROSS-BORDER DIARIES

Bulletin on West African local-regional realities
With the support of the Sahel and West Africa Club

Emersion in the Karakoro Basin

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No. 10, January 2009

Editorial

In this special Karakoro, you will find a series of focus...

- The word to the actors and local elected representatives
- Questions to GRDR Africa Director

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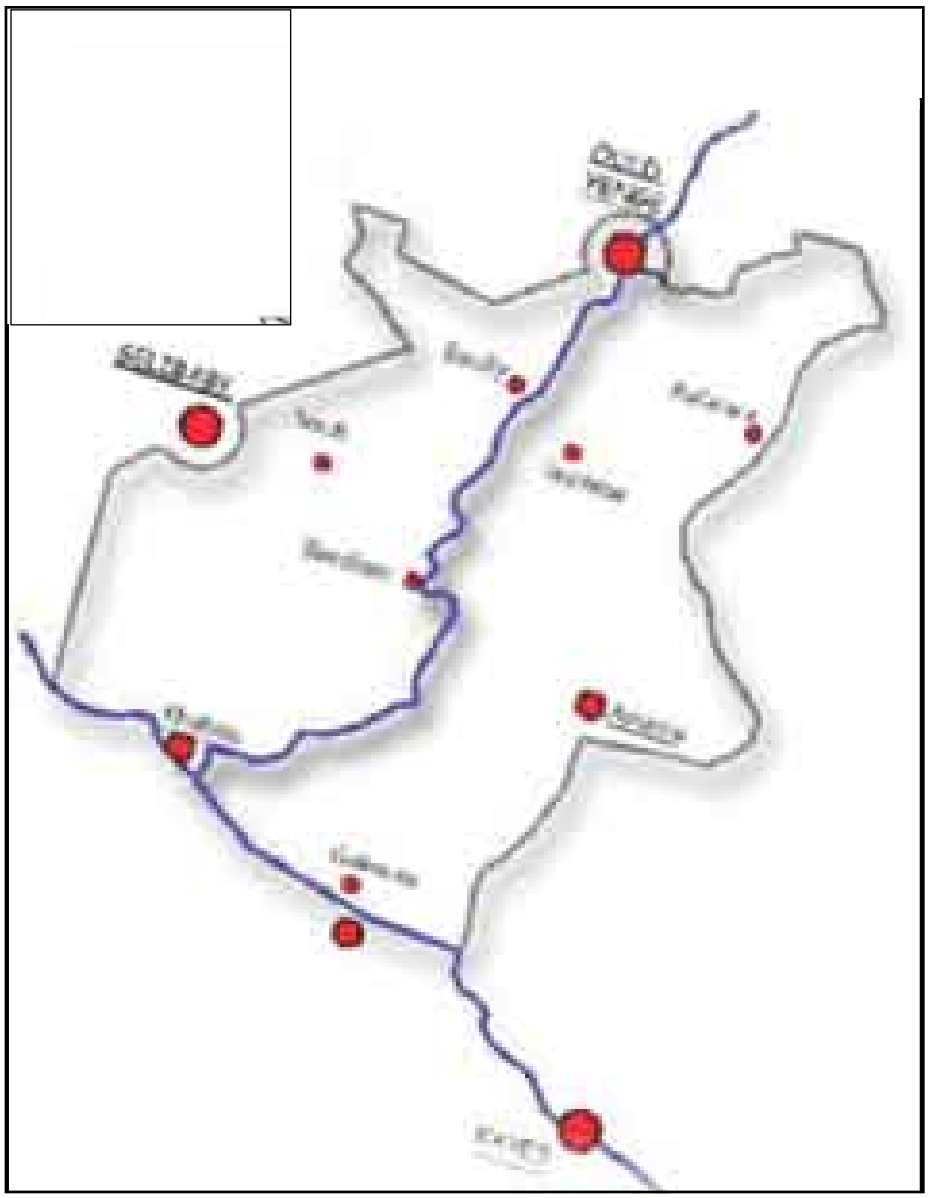
Dear Readers,

At the beginning of this year of 2009, we would like to wish you all the greatest success, the fruitful pursuance of the Karakoro programme and for our Magazine to continue to thrive. This is also a year in which there are a few relocations: Arezki Harkouk is now posted to Paris after a long stay in Mauritania; Aguibou Diarrah is now leading the African Union Border Programme in Addis Abeba; Michel Bolouvi our journalist is now even a little closer to the borders in Fada N'Gourma and no longer in Niamey. This issue focuses on the Karakoro Basin where populations on either side of the border are demonstrating a strong commitment to border development, whether they are local or institutional actors: a rapprochement, strengthened through GRDR action.●

Enjoy the issue!

The editors



Can cross-border cooperation make miracles?

In the Karakoro Basin, we don't ask for much; only to change the behaviour of riverbank residents.
Given a particularly fragile socio-economic environment, the precariousness of natural resources under great pressure, there could be a shift to concerted cross-border management.

Decompartmentalisation, the evolution of border cooperation towards a new cross-border cooperation dynamic; encouraging the convergence and integration of local actors' initiatives renders the "cross-border area" or local integration concept credible and effective.

17 January 2008 is an important date in the CIP implementation process in the Karakoro Basin. The project had been an operational idea and from this date forward it would become a reality.

A cross-border perspective

At the meeting held on 17 January 2008 at the Hotel Olympe in Bamako, Mali, the draft document on the "concerted management of the Karakoro Basin" was validated. The project was made official at this meeting, sponsored both by General Kafougouna Koné, Malian Minister of Territorial Administration and Local Communities and Yahya ould Kebd, Mauritanian Minister of Decentralisation and Territorial Planning. The Malian Minister of Internal Security and Civil Protection, the Mauritanian Ambassador to Mali and a representative of the Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs were also present. The strong political repre-

sentation of both countries sharing the Karakoro Basin illustrated the official nature of the project's launch. This was just one stage as the project has been underway for a long time.
While the meeting did not get the project started, this official launching provided the opportunity to bring information up to date on this project, which has been in the planning for some years. It also gave the initiators the chance to open up the project to criticism and encourage its adoption by all.
As for the start up of other ECOWAS Cross-border Initiatives Programme (CIP) initiatives, the approach enables the project, in its development phase, to be self-sufficient with fewer actors in order to be efficient. On the other hand, it requires large scale appropriation because the CIP basically involves local actors: populations, locally-elected officials, governments, and governors. In addition to the traditional interventions at an official ceremony, the two ministers confirmed the involvement of the Malian and Mauritanian Governments.
General Kafougouna Koné and Yahya ould Kebd are supporters of the Declaration with political implications, at least for these two countries. They recognise this project's positive aspects among which are the promotion of good neighbour relations, local development, peace and lasting security all along their common border, encouraging solidarity and trade. The concerted management programme of the Karakoro Basin can be a tool for economic and social development and thus integration. In effect, this project, requiring sectoral policy coherence between the two countries, can lead to other initiatives within the Karakoro Basin along the border between Mali and Mauritania: one step towards realising regional integration. The launching of the CIP in the Karakoro Basin affirmed the willingness to make this small-scale integration part of a broader scale: the demonstration in particular that integration is not new in this part of West Africa. It just needs to be revealed.
This past 17 January 2008, Professor Moctar ould El Hacen, Counsellor to the Mauritanian Minister of Decentralisation and Territorial Planning provided of this integration which has been developing for a long time between Mali and Mauritania and sanctioned by the "Cooperation and Good Neighbour Agreements" (see facsimile Transhumance Agreements, 19 September 1989).
Mali and Mauritania have been linked since independence by cross-border cooperation frameworks. The problem is that the numerous legal instruments that underpin these agreements are little, indeed unknown by local communities. Professor Moctar ould El Hacen affirmed, "long-standing cooperation between Mauritania and Mali is continuous, progressive and affects various domains (…)". Between the two countries there is the geographic dimension. It is up to humans to seek, extract and develop the complementarities between these two countries. According to the professor, humans have not failed.
Attesting to this is the "legal cooperation framework between the two countries and direct areas of cooperation between administrative authorities, local communities and civil society".
Untiring missionary of cross-border cooperation, Aguibou S. Diarrah, Director of the National Borders Directorate of Mali was also present to advocate, again and always, for "establishing viable regional zones", at the regional as well as the continental level. He participated in the launching of CIP initiatives: i) 2005 - Sikasso (Burkina-Côte d'Ivoire-Mali) and Ziguinchor (Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau); and ii) 2007 - Katsina (Nigeria-Niger). He, along with Laurent Bossard of the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC), being optimistic about cross-border cooperation, encouraged the CIP's creation.


The two ministers: the Mauritanian Yahya ould Kebd (on left) and the Malian Général Kafougouna Koné.


Moctar ould El Hacen


Aguibou S. Diarrah


Laurent Bossard

Head of the SWAC's Local Development and Regional Integration Unit, Mr. Bossard is well-placed to restate the programme's issues. Cross-border cooperation as a "tool" is a major goal and a political vision as well as being strategic in the construction of the West African region.

An programme supported by three pillars:

i) "financing" for which it shall work on establishing a regional fund for cross-border cooperation; ii) "regional West African capacities" as cross-border cooperation is stimulated by active and committed human resources; iii) a new Afro-European "partnership" with the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR).

The launching of the CIP in the Karakoro Basin confirmed i) the implication of ministries involved in the process as well as all the administrative bodies of both countries; ii) ECOWAS' strong presence, which will provide the regional glue; iii) appropriation by populations and civil society.

The next step …. Making it an operational, successful "convergence of sectoral policies of both countries, in particular policies related to the economy, local development and legislation, etc.":

i) "capitalising on the subsidiarity principle, in particular in the area of peace and security; ii) strengthening of territorial competitiveness"; and iii) "sharing infrastructures, services, resources, etc."

Taking advantage of this momentum, Malian and Mauritanian government representatives promised direct budgetary commitments and contributions to national indicative programmes of the 10th EFD. The Basin's concerted management project can also count on actors from the Kayes region: governors, local communities, French cooperation and decentralised Nord Pas de Calais cooperation which would like to be included in the Karakoro initiative in the regional development of Kayes. Already a partner in the implementation of the CIP in the S.K.Bo (Sikasso-Bobo-Korhogo) zone, UNDP Mali has also shown interest. With the SWAC and the GRDR joining together to mobilise other partners, there is much optimism surrounding the concerted management project of the Karakoro Basin.

The meeting's participants would like actions to be carried out this year (2008) and to have an effective inclusive programme in January 2009.

Mr. Arezki Harkouk, GRDR Africa Director, provided responses to participants.●

Arezki Harkouk

The Karakoro Basin Initiative

On 17 January in Bamako a meeting was held to institutionally validate the concerted management project in the Karakoro Basin (the Karakoro Initiative). The GRDR Africa Director, Mr. Arezki Harkouk, explained that prior to this meeting, the project was developed through consultations with all participating parties, governments, Karakoro actors, technical and financial partners. These entities also discussed the validation of field data, in particular, from Nouakchott and Kayes.

View of a bank of the Karakoro

Mr. Harouk also recalled that the Karakoro Initiative was set up as a result of "testimonials as well as a strong demand from local actors for more intense cross-border cooperation, better support from the States, strong political involvement by the States encouraging local cross-border initiatives and finally the availability of development partners to be included in strategic thinking, action and dissemination of cross-border cooperation experiences".

The Initiative was presented "as a process in the building of a coherent framework and collectively regulating cross-border cooperation in the Karakoro Basin to benefit populations in the area". Local and territorial communities play a vital role. This involves "better integration of populations, resources and territories with a development prospects for peace, security and environmental improvement".
Mr. Harkouk envisages a Karakoro project that shall inspire and lead to initiatives in other border areas linking Mali and Mauritania.

As the Karakoro zone's history is based on emigration, Mr. Harkouk sees an alternative for a large majority of those who have no other choice than to leave, unsure if they will be able to return, and for those residing abroad, to come back to new prospects.

Mr. Harkouk is very optimistic even if he presents the Karakoro area "as a particularly fragile socio-economic environment due to the severe precariousness of its natural resources, as a result of intense pressure". But he believes it is possible to reverse this trend.

Concerted management certainly helps face this challenge of bringing this area back from the brink of devastation. This joining of forces of both countries and the participation of populations on the Basin's riverbanks shall draw on the energy of this initiative of which

Mauritania and ECOWAS, new nuptuals?

Mauritania was a member, is no longer a member, could become a member again? Between Mauritania and ECOWAS has trouble burying historic links.

While Mauritania withdrew from ECOWAS on 1 January 2002, this withdrawal had practically no consequences on its political, human, social and economic relations with the other countries. Mauritania has observer status within ECOWAS, oddly with partner States in the OMVS.
With regard to cooperation with the European Union, the Cotonou Agreement, seeking to form a regional Euro-African free trade bloc, bound Mauritania to ECOWAS.
With the recent changeover to democracy in Mauritania, and since the beginning of the transition process in 2007, does the country's current regime envisage returning to ECOWAS? Does the naming of a special Mauritanian representative to ECOWAS and the declarations of high-level Mauritanian officials lean towards this?●

Controlling migration

Although emigration is more prominent, the Karakoro Basin remains an important immigration area.
Populations of the Karakoro Basin considered migration as an alternative to poverty, isolation and marginalisation experienced by many cross-border zones in West Africa.
The phenomenon is long-standing in the Senegal River Basin in general and in the Karakoro Basin in particular. In the zone, Mauritanians, Malians, and Senegalese have been demonstrating this since the 19th century. In the mid-1990s, approximately 500 000 people, from 100 or so villages of the river region and the Karakoro Basin, migrated towards the internal West African region or towards Europe (European Union) and fewer to North America.

Migrants actively participate in the financing of actions and development of their places of origin. During the 1980s, monthly remittances of migrants originating from Guidimakha reached 300 million Ouguiya, or ten times more than State remittances. But their investments have for a long time been confined to village and familial solidarities (schools, health clinics, mosques, etc.). The Karakoro initiative should re-situate the modalities and recipients of these direct actions and especially those aiming to promote decentralised North-South cooperation partnerships

At the regional level, the EU -ECOWAS partnership policy incorporates the promotion of a job and migration strategy. In this regard, measures have been taken to support the integration of migratory issues in community policies and providing ECOWAS and States with the means and capacities to reduce the detrimental aspects of migration.
The EU intends also to support the management of internal migration flows within the region and beyond. The mechanism should however find coherence between the policy strongly supported by ECOWAS: the free movement of goods and persons as a regional integration factor and that of its partner, the European Union, which is increasingly pulling back migration's borders●

the main objective is "to contribute to improving the living conditions of the communities living in the Basin, strengthening good neighbour policies and local integration". Multi-actor concerted effort is thus at the core of this initiative.

The GRDR has developed a four-year programme on the basis of a participative approach focusing on four areas: i) local coordination and concerted management of natural resources; ii) improvement of the border area's infrastructure; iii) strengthening cross-border economic dynamics; and iv) capitalising on and producing methodological tools.

However, according to Mr. Harkouk, "dynamic cross-border cooperation supported by strong political willingness and an adequate institutional framework is still a challenge to meet while striving to substantially alleviate the border's complexity in the lives of populations". He asserts that numerous obstacles and constraints must be overcome and major problems need to be resolved in order to make the Karakoro Basin a living Basin.
Field realties indeed the daily lives of populations and border users are full of frustrations and hassles: "despite the willingness expressed by ECOWAS States and Mauritania, borders remain areas for harassment and corruption. More security posts, which are in fact control posts, provide opportunities for "official" levies, fines and other infractions which are impediments greatly affecting border populations".

Agreement Concerning Transhumance Between The Republic of Mali And The Islamic Republic of Mauritania

• In accordance with the provisions of the epizootic agreement signed 20 July 1968 and amended 2 February 1986 between the Republic of Mali and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania,
• Considering the importance of the movement of livestock herds between the two countries
• Considering the factors motivating this transhumance and the various other movement of livestock in the border zone between the two countries which are mainly to seek pastures and watering points,
• Considering the ecological, health, socio-economic and legal problems which can result from the large movements of livestock,

The two parties have agreed on the following:

AN AGREEMENT CONCERNING TRANSHUMANCE between the Republic of Mali and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

• As well as,

THE PRACTICAL MODALITIES OF THIS TRANSHUMANCE has been established and signed by the Joint Mali Mauritania Commission held in Nouakchott from 13 to 20 September 1989;
The texts are attached to this document.

CHAPTER I
PRACTICAL MODALITIES OF TRANSHUMANCE

Article 1 – Transhumance is carried out in the two (2) countries from six (6) to nine (9) months during the year. This period will be determined by agreement by the competent border authorities.
Article 2 – The animal which will be moved for a given period will be in accordance of the available forage in the regions.

Article 3 – The southern limit for transhumance is set by the Sadiola, Bafoulabé, Kologani, Banamba, Ségou, Djénné, Bankass, Koro border line for mauritanian herds. For malian herds, the southern limit is set from the Timbédra to Djiguéni border line.
The southern limit for camels will be set at the Aourou, Koussané, Sandaré, Diéran, Dioumaran Mourdiah, Sokolo, Dioura border line.
Article 4 – Prohibited zones, protected areas, special and community forests can only be used in accordance with the provisions set out in the forestry code of the host country.
Article 5 – The exploitation of ponds, wells and rivers is subject to the provisions set out in the forestry code in force in the host country.
Article 6 – In the transhumance zone, pruning is subject to the provisions set out in the forestry code of the host country.
Article 7 – All transhumant herds must pass through one of the entrance and exit posts of each of the countries set out below:

Malian side:

Diboli	Ballé	Sokolo
Melgué	Nara	Nampala
Bilikouaté	Guiré	Léré
Tambakaray	Yélimané	Kaselma
Kirané	Tourougoumbé	
Nioro du Sahel	Dily	
Gogui		

Mauritanian side:

Kabou	Gogui	Abdel Bagrou
Melgué	Kobony	Tiky
Ould Yenjé	Gleibatt	Bassikounou
Hamoud	Djéguéni	Fassala
Tafara	Mabrouk	
Toull	Boustella	
Kankhossa	Jégui	

Transhumants must adhere to the epizootic agreement between the two countries.
Article 8 – If the provisions in the epizootic agreement are not respected, the herd will be quarantined and vaccinated.

Mr. Harkouk thus referred back to his introduction, stating that political commitment is needed, in order to guarantee conditions conducive to better movement of persons and goods. State's responsibility, within the framework of regional integration policies with the support of bilateral and multilateral partners, depends on all the concerted conflict and resources management mechanisms, opening up, improving commercial trade circuits, territorial development.
Local actors, genuine providers of cross-border dynamics, implement this cooperation.
Mr. Harkouk bases his optimism on community links going far back in history between populations on both Karakoro river banks: "there is cross-border cooperation in the Karakoro Basin. Populations trade and interact daily in various sectors such as health, education, trade, livestock, conflict management the sharing of natural resources, etc." "Homogeneity, solidarity, trade and complementarities which underpin life in the basin go beyond the border".

Article 9 – The vaccinations in the host country will be paid for by the livestock breeders.

CHAPTER II
CONDUCT AND SECURITY OF THE ANIMALS

Article 10 – Every transhumant livestock breeders must:
- Assure effectively the security of his animals;
- Respect the official regulations with regard to grazing in the host country.

The roaming off course of animals is punishable by law.

CHAPTER III
ADMINISTRATIVE FORMALITIES

Article 11 – Transhumant livestock breeders must submit herd-specific statistics to inventory services: species by species, category by category. This inventory must be carried out by livestock agents who notify the administrative authorities upon arrival of the transhumants concerned.

Article 12 – At their charge, transhumants can request veterinary medical and vaccination provisions for their livestock. In this case, the livestock service will make all the necessary arrangements to satisfy the demand.

Article 13 – Transhumant livestock breeders must adhere to the regulations regarding the movement of goods and persons. In the same vein, the host country must assure security for transhumants and their goods in accordance with the mutual assistance convention between the two (2) countries.

Article 14 – During transhumance, hunting, the cutting down of trees, and brush fires are vehemently forbidden.

Article 15 – In a situation of conflict, transhumants must present themselves to the competent local authorities and avoid taking justice into their own hands.

Article 16 – At the completion of the transhumance, the transhumants must return to their country of origin in accordance with the provisions of Article 7.

CHAPTER IV
FINAL PROVISIONS

Article 17 – Any violation of these provisions will be punished in accordance with the laws and regulations in force in the host country.

Article 18 – This agreement will enter into force provisionally upon its signing and definitively after ratification by both parties.

Done in Nouakchott, 19 September 1989

For the Government of Republic of Mali
MAMADOU SISSOKO
Minister of Justice, Garde des Sceaux

For the Government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania
Commandant **CHEIKH SID'AHMED OULD BABE**
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

The cross-border basin of Karakoro with localization of villages

The nine riverside communes

Between the north-western Mali and south-eastern Mauritania, Karakoro riverside populations have almost everything to live happily: enough rainfall, numerous water courses, and relatively significant natural resources. But there are three drawbacks: i) no road infrastructure; ii) sand encroachment; and iii) severe water erosion. Sealed off, nothing exacerbates the building of pressure on natural resources and feeding community tensions better.

Administratively, the Karakoro initiative focuses on a zone that includes a total of nine communities bordering the wadi on both sides of which there are four Malian communes and five Mauritanian communes.
The Malian communes are administratively attached to Kayes while the Mauritanian communes depend on the departments or "moughataas" of Sélibaby and de Ould Yengé in the region or "wilaya" of Guidimakha.

The nine communes cover an area of 6 900 km^2 with a population of approximately 143 000 inhabitants, which is around 20 inhabitants / km^2.

Soninkés, Fulanis, Khassonkés, Moors and to a lesser extent, Bambaras, make up the main ethnic groups populating this area.
This population is unevenly spread over 140 villages of which 33 are Malian and 107 Mauritanian.

Geographically, the Karakoro Basin is situated in an area on the periphery

A living Basin

The Karakoro, or Great Lake in the Soninké language, is a wadi which takes its source from the Assaba foothills (centre of Mauritania) and empties itself, some 150 km away, in the Senegal River, near Khabou. Over three-quarters of its length, it forms the border between Mali and Mauritania, and separates the communes of Kayes Cercle from those of Guidimakha Wilaya, whose capital town is Sélibaby.

The Basin's Sudano-Sahelian-type climate includes three seasons: i) the dry season (November to February), cultivation period; ii) the hot season (March to June), the lean season when water reserves are depleted; and iii) the rainy or wintering season (July to October), when the rain "enriches" the Basin's soils.

The Karakoro Basin is no longer the oasis of greenness that it once was with abundant surface water, luxuriant pasturelands, lands naturally fertilized by the wadi floods, forests and palm groves, abundant fauna and flora. Now it is mainly an agro-pastoral zone.

Farming, sedentary and transhumant livestock breeding are the main activities of the population on both riversides. The markets have monkey bread, Arabic gum, jujube and other picked products which maintain trade in Karakoro Basin local markets. Cross-border cooperation is mostly a social activity in the Karakoro Basin where often the wadi is crossed on foot or in a canoe for weddings, baptisms, funerals, medical care and others reasons illustrating the close and many links between the riverside populations.

Karakoro is a basin of life for the Malians and Mauritanians combining resources, jointly using infrastructure and facing adversities together●

of the Sahel with normal rainfall of approximately 300 to 600 mm, favourable to agro-pastoralism.
In addition with an herbaceous vegetative cover and in areas wooded, the pedologic soils are favourable for crops, essentially rain-fed crops. The area is less exposed to wind erosion; however there is severe water erosion due to the ground's incline on the East-West axis towards the Karakoro Basin and the Senegal River.

Erosion caused by the numerous water courses striates the zone making moving around in the zone treacherous. Consequently, almost all the communities are isolated during the long rainy season, whether it be the communes within each country or the communes of both countries.
At certain periods of the year, emergency interventions in the zone are difficult, even impossible. Health emergency evacuations are tricky: ailing persons are transported via animal-drawn vehicles under dangerous conditions. In some cases, this is made impossible due to the periodic total secludedness. But this situation is not only related to health problems, during the winter season supplies are also cut off.

The Karakoro Basin has relatively significant natural resources: agriculture, livestock, forestry, fisheries, etc. But their abundance is relative and they are subject to intense human and animal pressure. In addition, demographic pressure and climate change are accelerating the deterioration of the vegetative cover and soils, notably due to sand encroachment.
Water, land and vegetative cover resources are becoming scarce leading to a sharp increase in conflict while the yields diminish and latent food security is established.

The Karakoro Basin is a final destination during the lean period and/or at the time when Mauritanian herds are moving towards the west, centre, east and often north of the country towards Mali and Senegal.
The relative abundance of pastureland and farm crop development are upping the land stakes in the zone where land is still usually obtained through inheritance.

Such pressure on natural resources, of course, encourages social tensions

Communes and villages situated on a 5km radius from Karakoro and their population

On the Malian side

Village Name	Population in 1998	Population in 2003	Name of commune
Serenaty	2005	2439	Djélébou
Leya	2134	2596	Djélébou
Nahaly	1316	1397	Djélébou
Tichy	1592	1690	Djélébou
Bouillagui	1023	1086	Guidimakha Kery Kafo
Goussala	1879	1994	Guidimakha Kery Kafo
Sansangue	1835	1948	Guidimakha Kery Kafo
Boké Diamby	563	598	Guidimakha Kery Kafo
Souena Touckouleur	395	419	Karakoro
Kalinioro	2593	3155	Karakoro
Teichibe	2615	3182	Karakoro
Chwera Gandega	299	317	Karakoro
Bilikoite	710	754	Sahel
Selifely	2332	2837	Sahel

Sources: Population data from the Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat (RGPH) of Mali, April 1998 and Recensement A Caractère Electoral (RACE) of Mali, 2000.
Villages = Cross-border analysis, January 2007

No road infrastructure

Communes and villages situated on a 5km radius from Karakoro and their population

On the Mauritanian side

Village Name	Population in 1998	Population in 2003	Name of commune
Baediam	1900	2500	Baediam
Chiyé 1	248	250	Baediam
Chiyé 2	364	400	Baediam
Melgue	1266	1700	Baediam
Darsalam	370	400	Baediam
Kankou	630	400	Baediam
Masgoul	186	300	Baediam
Chacata	309	320	Baediam
Hel Soukabe	100	200	Baediam
Keleila	200	200	Baediam
M'Baghde	99	250	Baediam
Boully	500		Boully
Doubel	180		Boully
Aweinatt Sidre Peul	100		Boully
Chalkha dakhna	1100		Boully
Chalkha yero	140		Boully
Gombana1/Nahaile	370		Boully
Saidou Ehel Sidi	900		Boully
Tayibatt/Lemkainez	450		Boully
Wouro Soule	100		Boully
Kalinioro	2875		
Arkaw	600	600	Khabou
Mouslim 1	400	400	Khabou
Nenethiou	100	150	Khabou
Slakha			Khabou
Chilekha	1200	1300	Khabou
Digogni	60	70	Khabou
Khabou Kothie	70	70	Khabou
Mouslim 2	300	150	Khabou
Saboucire	2300	3300	Khabou
Boké Diamby	2000	2600	Khabou
Khabou	4500	6500	Khabou
Guelewol 2	70	100	Ould Yenge
Hel Abeidy	100	250	Ould Yenge
Oued Eljrid	110	200	Ould Yenge
Ould Yenge	2158	3500	Ould Yenge
Tashorte			Souffi

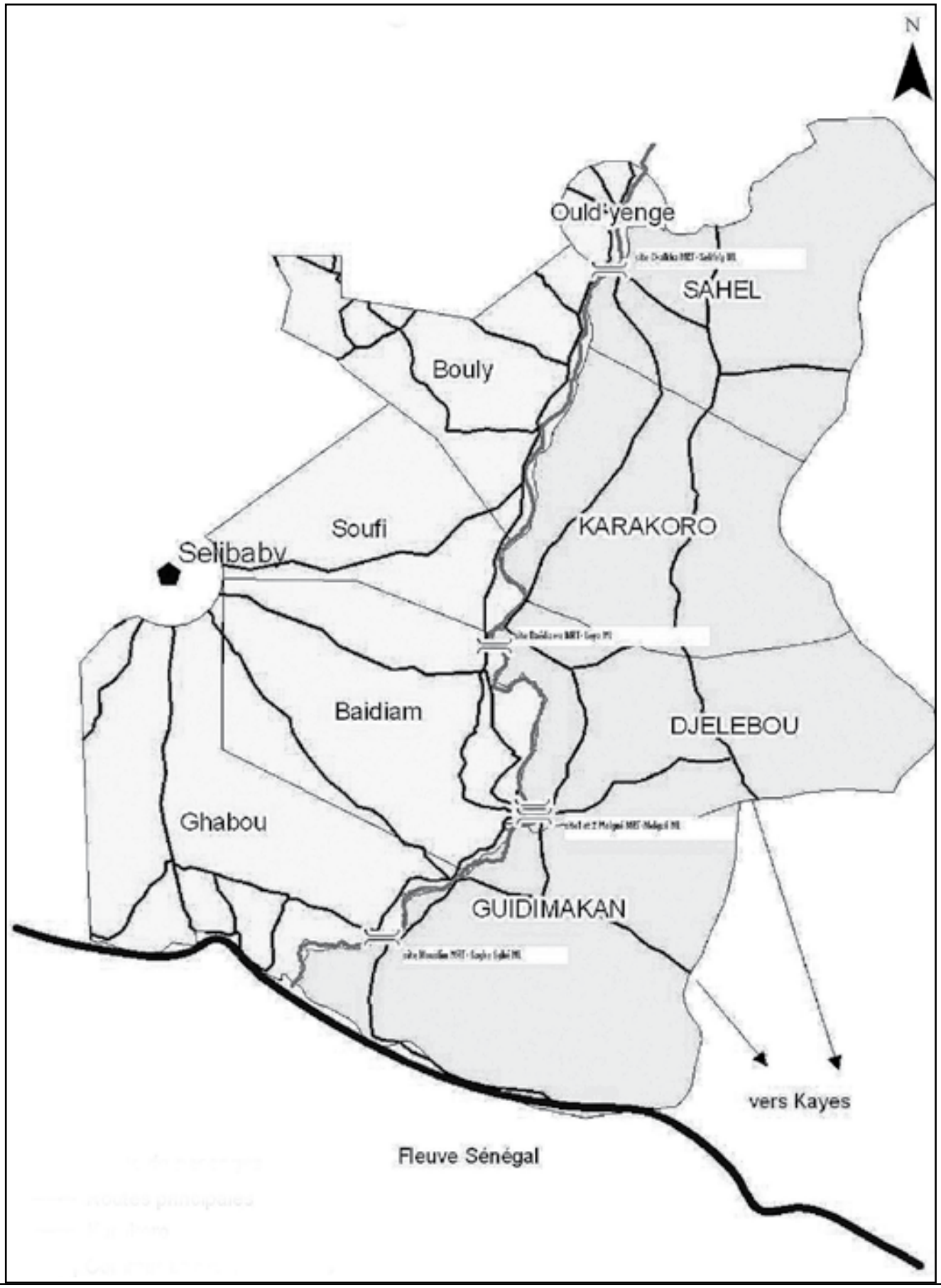
Sources: commune monographic data, population estimates (No. of households * by average/household)

related to difficulties in accessing land, securing crops, animal grazing, over-exploitation of natural products, harvesting, firewood, straw thatch, hay, etc.

The decentralisation process recently underway in Mali and Mauritania has made the situation more complex by fragmenting traditional land rules without providing alternative rules applying to all of the communes.
Thus, a drought or another natural disaster, flood or locust invasion immediately place the population in a dangerously precarious situation of severe food crisis even acute famine.
The Karakoro Basin is at the same time rich and precarious as it is terribly vulnerable in so many ways●

The Karakoro Basin is no longer the oasis of greenness.

The Karakoro initiative focuses on a zone that includes a total of nine communities bordering the wadi on both sides of which there are four Malian communes and five Mauritanian communes.



A common resources fund

The zone has been generous and now it is running out for both human and natural reasons. It is not by chance that the Karakora Basin is experiencing intense human pressure.

A haven from the catastrophic droughts of 1974 and 1983 as well as for victims of the 1989 Senegalo-Mauritanian conflict, the Basin is the number one destination choice in this desert region.

The Karakoro initiative does not promise a return to the abundance of the past. There are constraints, however, it can re-orient existing management and strive to regenerate the Basin where possible. It can rely on the already active consciousness of the Karakoro population.

The baobab, a tree called "all good" **».**

Natural resources

Sorghum, corn, jujube, Arabic gum, monkey bread, fruit juice, mats, winnowing baskets, bamboo stems, wood slats are only a sampling of the numerous products available on Karakoro Basin markets. […] Demographic pressure and decreasing rains have since led to instability. But in this border region, between north-west Mali and south-east Mauritania, the economy is "naturally" organised around unprocessed resources.

The climate, desertification, less rain, but mostly man's activity-related over-exploitation threatens renewal and consistency of natural resources in the river basin. Trade has thus become commercial and sometimes conflictual.

Fortunately cooperation is the new precept for protection and management. Riverside populations have […] officially established rules to access resources for their preservation. Thus, in Sélifély, at the north of the Basin, Malian and Mauritanian livestock

including in transhumance can graze freely, without compensation. On the contrary, excavating straw is prohibited which is a restrictive measure to preserve foraging resources. Similar measures are in force in the southern part of the Basin.

The exploitation of the Baobab grows profusely in the area but it is in great demand and now regulated in Bokédiambi, Mali. The various products of this tree called "all good" have many uses (monkey bread for making drinks, leaves to flavour couscous, bark from which rope is made) thus it is prohibited to cut down or prune the Baobab from June to August when water is rare and picking the Baobab's leaves could weaken the tree and eventually kill it.
In Melgue, Mauritania, a local community management association (LCMA) carries out strategic thinking on the setting up of systems for certain resources.
Prior to the concerted project capitalising on the Basin, local populations responded by promptly placing increased pressure on natural resources.

The Karakoro initiative should be able to better coordinate and streamline these initiatives so natural resources in the Karakoro Basin are managed effectively and concertedly.

Culture of corn at the edge of the Karakoro

Livestock

The Karakoro Basin is a natural grazing zone for village livestock breeders on both sides of the river but also a transhumance area where, in November and December, herds coming from the interior of Mauritania graze on the herbaceous covering and the rest of the recessional crops before migrating towards Kayes in Mali seeking new pastures.
Conversely, livestock breeders coming from inner Mali only frequent the Basin during the winter. Livestock breeders from both countries place a great deal of pressure on the Basin.

On the Mauritanian side, the increase in transhumant pastoralism in the Basin is a result of lack of rainfall and the general re-direction of transhumance flows after the Senegalo-Mauritanian events of April 1989.

From Guidimakha, Gorgol, Assaba and sometimes Brakna and Tagant, animals (sheep, goats, cattle, donkeys and camels), frequent the Basin as soon as the cold weather ends and remain throughout the hot season until the beginning of winter.

On the Malian side, transhumance of sheep, goats, and cattle escape from the resurgence of parasitosis during the rainy season in Mali and benefit from salt cures notably in the Mauritanian communities of Chalkha and Kankossa.

Livestock breeding in Sahel countries cannot exist without transhumance. But the driving of animals has consequences on farmers, notably in riverside villages of the Karakoro Basin.

This North-South and South-North pendulum movement in the Karakoro Basin is very disciplined. (See Box: Requirements for livestock breeders).

Requirements for livestock breeders (Mauritanians) who want to bring their animals to Mali for grazing.

1- Livestock breeders should be responsible for taking their animals to the veterinarian for vaccinations in the Khabou arrondissement (they will be provided with a vaccination certificate) or they must provide a health certificate stating that the animals are healthy.
2- The head of the veterinary service must also provide him with a transhumance certificate which identifies the shepherd, the exact composition of his herd, the illnesses for which the animals have been vaccinated and their destination in Mali.
3- A pass provided by the Khabou prefet.
The pass and transhumance certificate are valid for both Malian and Mauritanian shepherds●

Mauritania and Mali are furthermore linked by agreements on transhumance which are part of daily life of Karakoro riverside populations.

The positive side is that animals guarantee meat and other livestock products for the villages. The negative aspect is the deterioration of the environment. Besides brush fires and excessive cutting of wood by the shepherds, transhumance depletes the pastures all around the Karakoro Basin.

Also, the roaming of animals leads to conflicts between livestock breeders and farmers. Finally, herds attract thieves and some villagers accuse the shepherds, on the return, of explicitly bringing animals into their territory that do not belong to them.
The Karakoro initiative will certainly address the concerted management of the relationship between livestock breeders and farmers●

Trade

The Basin offers a large number of products although it is not overflowing. For some commodities, populations must leave it to the merchants who need roads to supply the markets.

Here lies the recurring problem in Karakoro which is secluded as it is devoid of roads linking up the closest villages, Sélibaby and Nouakchott on the Mauritanian side and, Kayes and Bamako on the Malian side.

The problem of access to supply centres is crucial for villages in the Basin. Roads are lacking between communities located on either side of the basin although they are very close to one another as well between supply centres which are very far away and Nouakchott

and Sélibaby on the Mauritanian side and Bamako and Kayes on the Malian side.
Inaccessibility is even more serious during the rainy season when roads and paths cutting through the region are almost unusable. Local merchants […] ensure the availability of basic food products such as sugar, tea, material, local or manufactured products on the local markets as well as to supply local stores.

Secludedness is such that commercial trade focuses on the importation of necessary staple food products. Trade is reduced to small boutiques, open-air tables and "travelling" boutiques, itinerant wagons and cyclists who transport all sorts of products from door to door on both riversides of the Basin.

The food trade alone, traffic and the means of transport are adapted to the situation: wagons, bicycles and transport where 4x4 and trucks cannot pass. These transport-related difficulties lead to sharp product price increases and randomly impact the development of significant trade volumes around the Karakoro Basin.
Health issues are even more dramatic as a result of seclusion (See Box: The hardship of isolation)●

Local trade

Lack of roads does not take away from the charm of local markets all along the Karakoro Basin. As long as they can move about, Malians and Mauritanians engage in import-export trade. Malians supply palm for example which they transport to Kayes where there is a cattle feed processing plant.
Mauritanians supply cereals, hand-made products (cooking rings, kitchen utensils, etc.) as well as natural resources by-products. Thus, they go more often to Mali with Baobab fruits, Arabic gum and vegetative fibres for making mats, fans, winnowing baskets, etc.
Village women from Leya and Nahali on the Malian side of the Basin, go to sell their surplus vegetables at the Baediam market on the Mauritanian side of the river and purchase at the same time Mauritanian hand-made products. Baediam women cross the Basin when they want to spruce up their wardrobe.

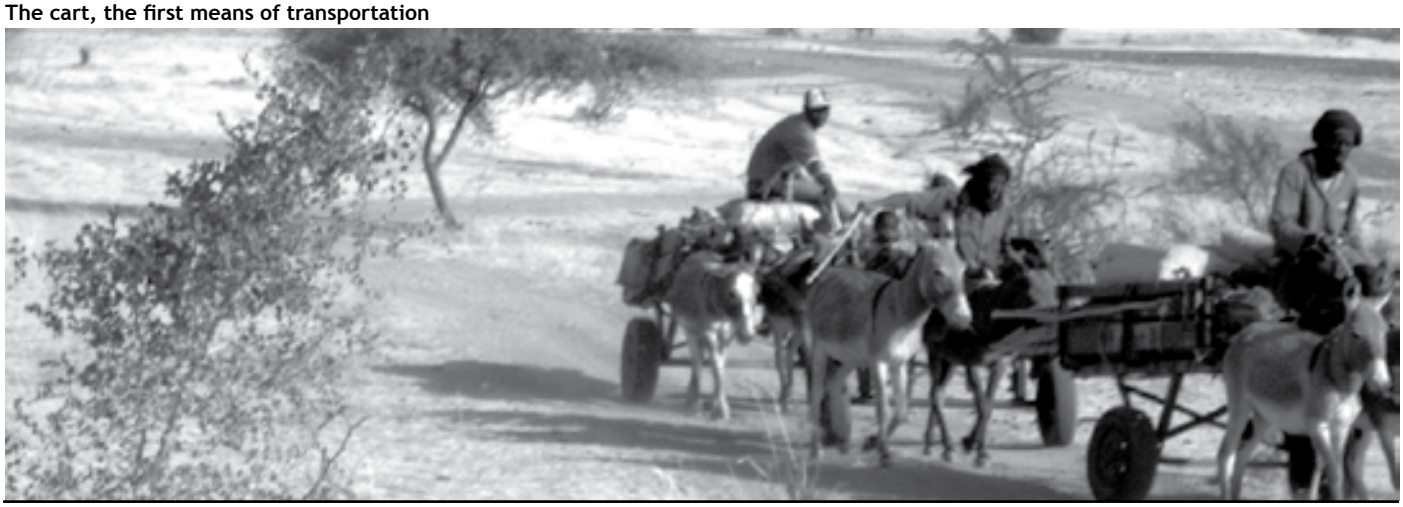
Cattle trade is also a cross-border activity with an upsurge of Mauritanian cattle exports since the devaluation of the CFA Franc favourable to the Ouguiya, the Mauritanian currency (1 CFA = 1/2 UM).
Here also, the Karakoro initiative is expected to support the Basin's economy, improve local trade and thus strengthen relations between the two countries●

The hardship of isolation

Isolation which increases the products' market value, takes a tragic turn when health issues are involved. On a good day, it takes a half day to get to the hospital in Kayes or Sélibaby which are the closest health centres to the Karakoro Basin. During the rainy season, this can turn dramatic.

In the Karakoro Basin, it is a euphemism to say that health care access is difficult. Health clinics on both riversides of the Karakoro are not the picture of health: human resources are scarce as are material means; electricity and drinkable water are not readily available. Health care workers can hardly take care of patients' basic needs.
Patients must then go further than the borders to seek the best available care. Health centres do not discriminate when caring for patients from both riverbanks.
Due to lack of funds, health centres do not communicate as well as their patients. An epidemic quickly turns into a health catastrophe due to lack of communication means between the Basin's health centres.
The Karakoro initiative can remedy this: harmonise health policies to define une aire de santé sur les deux pays, set up shared management of the costs to improve living conditions of the care-givers and patients, etc●

The cart, the first means of transportation



A border country

A river basin has never set the pace of populations' daily life as it does in this part of the Mali/ Mauritania border where the Karakoro fully attests to the pleasant and unpleasant events, according to the past or present.
Apart from the Moorish tents in Ould Yenge at the north of the basin, it is difficult to differentiate between the Malian and Mauritanian locales along the Karakoro border. Probably insufficient means but mostly as there are so few roads facilitates going from one village to the other, not from one country to another, far from immigration control posts. Free movement of persons ipso facto.

Nahaly, west of the Karakoro on the Malian side, is a village like any other. The only difference is the cement buildings compete with the clay houses and the mosque is magnificent.
This is the sign of migrants, well-established in villages along the Karakoro with carts and motorcycles, other signs of economic affluence. Besides this, the villages seem to be idle.
The Karakoro basin is languishing.
However, Aladji Camara, the Nahaly village chief, has a sing-song accent when he pronounces the name Karakoro: the Soninké names "xara" meaning elevation or height refers to a mountain and "xoré" which describes a river.

Chief Aladji Camara

This "xara xoré" or water that comes down from above enables a peaceful life and keeps hope alive.
For the sixty-something year old chief, the notion of Karakoro, a natural barrier between two locations, "is politics".
He further explains, "Otherwise, there is no separation, no difference between the populations surrounding the basin, because there was only one power, that of the colonist.
There was neither Mali nor Mauritania around the basin. After colonisation, the whites used the river as a natural marker to divide the two countries as well as Senegal."
Have the links between these two countries survived anyway? "Family links have endured but even there the divide is setting in: the basin is no longer a shared space or good, it is something different."

Chief Aladji Camara welcomes the concerted development initiative of the basin. "It is interesting because basically we are one people and will be united again." He is expecting the building of infrastructures to deisolate the basin. He says, "Roads are the priority for my village as they will facilitate every day life."
Life around the basin is upheld by the women. They are at the centre of daily activities beyond their traditional household duties. Fashion is brings them together to face adversity together. In Nahaly, women belong to a group called "Mergemou" which promotes "understanding and mutual aid."

Life around the basin is upheld by the women.

The group is only open to married women with currently 15 members. The Secretary-General, Mrs. Bintou Soumaré, would like to have the financial means to undertake other activities other than that of market gardening which today is their main occupation.

Bintou Soumaré

The village's cleanliness is due to this group which cleans it weekly. The women are not especially unhappy; their garden products sell well at the local market as well as to food wholesalers selling to other villages. They expect a lot from this project which they have heard about.
Aourou, a town in the rural commune of Djélébou, is little far away from the basin but not less dependent. The women also await the cross-border initiative with optimism. Their 10-year old association, "Sobe kafo" (those who work hard), has added another dimension to their lives.

Occasional dyers, they mostly tend to market gardening and have provided the village with a superb vegetable garden that includes tomatoes, lettuces and onions that sell well locally. But they have tremendous hope as indicated by Kadiatou Camara, the Chairperson. "We have been approached by NGOs and other groups.

Kadiatou Camara

We have received watering cans, wire netting with which to enclose the garden, a motor-driven pump for watering. We know however that we can do better with more tools."
The obsessive fear of idleness weighs heavily in Aourou. Telly Camara, Chairperson of the association of the few people remaining in the village, curses their life of "getting by."

Brick making is their main and only occupation during the 9 month long dry season. This cannot continue indefinitely and the evening football parties provide little consolation.

"But what can be done?" asks Telly Camara, "There are not many activities in our area."

Suffice it to say that migration remains the most serious job opportunity, even though it has become increasingly difficult of which Telly Camara is greatly aware. “Now the adventure is hard. I was in Gabon from 1986 to 1993. I advise the youth not to leave. But as there is nothing to do here, it is difficult to tell them not to go. We cannot stop them from going elsewhere seeking work. The younger generation prefers Europe and, in particular, France.

But migration has become very difficult so we manage at home. But many have left and more will leave. There are a lot of people from Aourou in France. Those who can help us do, mostly for the ball-playing sports.”

Telly Camara

Nahaly and its gem of a “secondary” health centre which is both a health and maternity clinic.

In Aourou women mostly tend to market gardening and have provided the village with a superb vegetable garden that includes tomatoes, lettuces and onions that sell well locally.

Social infrastructures are a source of pride for the Karakoro riverbank villages, like Nahaly and its gem of a “secondary” health centre which is both a health and maternity clinic. Since 2006, this centre has considerably reduced health concerns in the village and in the surrounding Fulani camps.

Asta Mariko

Its administrator and high-level health practitioner, Mrs. Kéita Asta Mariko, says that the centre is visited regularly “because of its staff’s competence and the availability of medication.”
Medical supplies are brought in by scooter going to and from Kayes which is a painful exercise.
But as Asta Mariko says, “The types of illnesses and visits set our supply schedule. We are doing everything possible not to run out of essential medication.”
The centre receives most patients during the rainy season with the upsurge of malaria. Other illnesses include diarrhoea due to the “lack of potable water”, skin diseases and scooter accidents. The health and maternity clinic’s spiffy solar energy system is unfortunately useless “because of a battery problem and its current bulbs are incompatible.”

However, the centre operates and the proceeds pay the staff’s salaries: the centre’s Head, mid-wife, the pharmacy manager, and the security guard. The maternity area, with 2 birthing tables and 6 beds, provides most of the money of the working capital of which the funds for families usually come from

remittances rather than local revenue. This demonstrates to what extent the regeneration of Karakoro's natural resources is awaited by its populations.
On the Mauritanian side, the large village of Boully, practically sitting in the Karakoro, also has its infrastructures such as a school, public fountain and a health centre. A much organised civil society guarantees their good management and coordination with communal authorities.


The school complex of Boully

There is a sort of civil society parliament called the Committee of Communal Coordination (CCC) which is presided by its chairperson, Mr. Diawara Sikhou. Mr. Sikhou works in coordination with Mr. Moussa Bakary Coulibaly, adminsitrative and financial official of the commune. He also works with Diawara Siré, Chairperson of the Boullian Association for Development and Integration (BADI). In mid-January, Doulo Fofana, Chairperson of the association of Boully nationals in France, paid a visit.


Doulo Fofana

Civil society's participation in the management of communal affairs is such that the CCC is located in the mayor's offices in Boully.


Batoumatou M. Mohammed

This CCC, at the centre of development activities in the rural community of Boully, was a GRDR idea to set up a coordination framework for all of the commune actors which include cooperatives, male and female, youth organisations and women's organisations, etc.

At the beginning, the Boully CCC brought together up to 50 entities; each represented by a delegate but, as indicated by Diawara Sikhou, "reduced the number of delegates to 31 in order to be more effective." The CCC carries out strategic thinking regarding the commune-based activities. "We are the active components of all that concerns the commune's development," clarifies Diawara Sikhou.
The CCC is pleased with the concerted development project of the Karakoro basin. While vacationing in the country, Doulo Fofana could get a feel for what was happening in the commune. He is appreciative, "For us migrants, this project is very important and we would like to be regularly kept up to date on this issue."


the Committee of Communal Coordination

Migrants will certainly support the initiative. Their only concern is the flow of information. "Information is key for us who are going to follow this from afar. We are part of the donors and for us, the Karakoro initiative is as important as other activities which we have been

carrying out up to now and which are still a priority, such as the recuperation of land, retaining surface water, isolation, managing land conflicts, management and even regeneration of forestry resources, etc."

A bit north of Boully the initiative is getting the population in Ould Yenge dreaming. Mrs. Batoumatou Mitt Mohammed, second deputy mayor, is expecting a great deal for the market gardening cooperatives and the new communal team is impatient.
The link with emigrants in France is also the main revenue. This is illustrated by the recent visit of the mayor in France at the invitation of migrants from the region. Bringing back the Karakoro of yore to populations is not expected but it is hoped that it will provide favourable conditions for genuine development.
The elders of the region, Cheikhna Babacar, of Ould Yenge, Diawara Ansoumane, former mayor of Boully and chairperson of the mayor's collective of Guidimaxa and Sidi Mohammed El hadj, Chairperson of the Ould Yenge CCC, have only known the exploitation of Karakoro's natural resources.

They are quite nostalgic but still lucid. One thing is for sure, the initiative is expected to kick off a fight against populations' idleness in the Karakoro basin by providing them with a wide range of activities.

Cheikhna Babacar

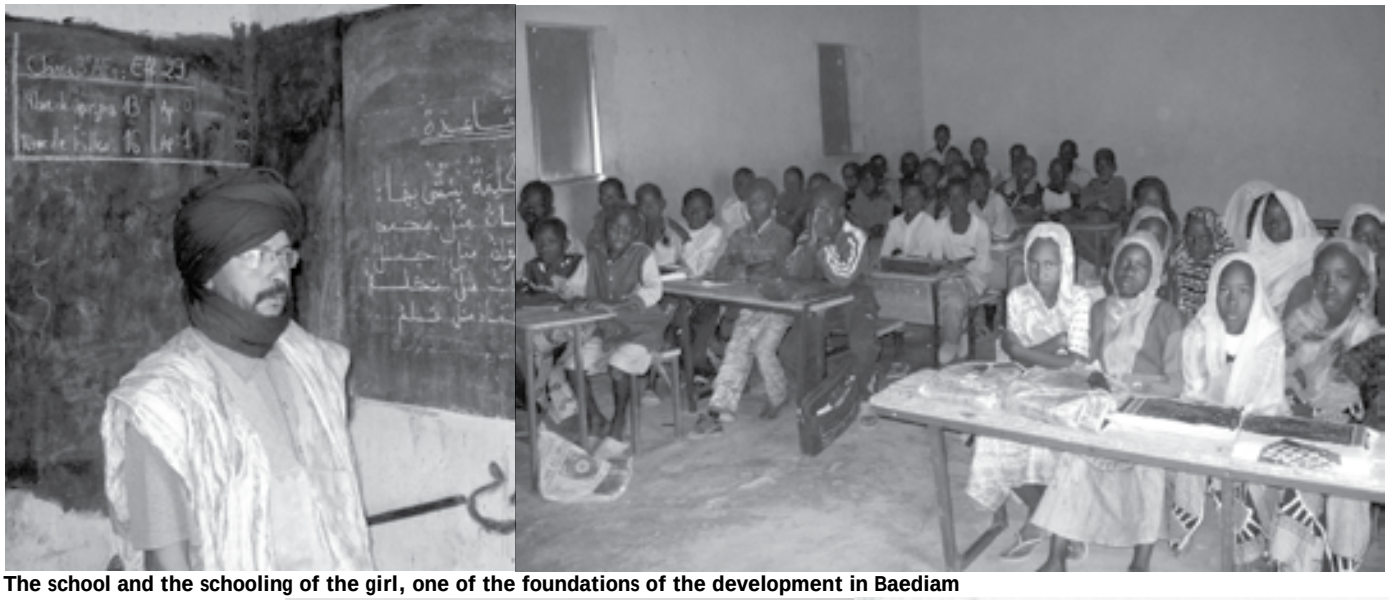
Sidi Mohammed El hadj, Chairperson of the Ould Yenge CCC

Diawara Ansoumane, former mayor of Boully

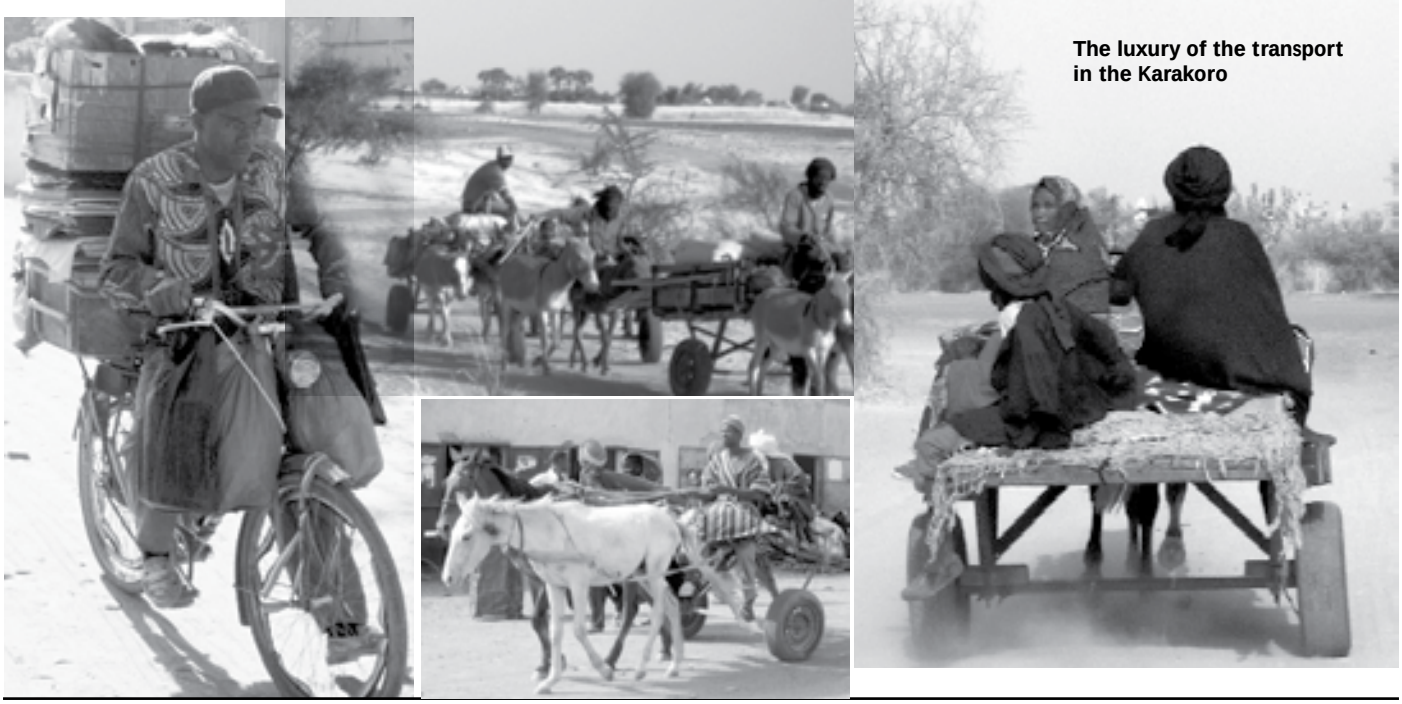
Well and garden in Boully

Both faces of the Karakoro: nostalgia and hope

The omnipresent tea in the rite of reception



The school and the schooling of the girl, one of the foundations of the development in Baediam



The luxury of the transport in the Karakoro

Mamadou Thiam (Kayes), URD (Union pour la République et la démocratie) Deputy.

"Keeping the population busy is key because conflicts are linked to poverty but mostly to idleness."

Is the Karakoro Basin important for the Kayes region?

The Karakoro Basin is tremendously important for Kayes as it is a natural bridge between Mali and Mauritania, it raises many issues and can be a source of friction in its exploitation, not to mention security problems. This is why this project comes just at the right time. We appreciate the initiative and are ready to support it.

How can the Basin development project reduce security problems?

Security problems can arise before just as well as after the project. The project can be a buffer zone just as insecurity can hinder the smooth running of the project. The theft of just one cow can lead to a conflict between two border villages. Thus, I believe that security problems in the basis are of the utmost importance. While in addition to peace and security, this a unifying project, an integration project, populations are going to surpass their small quarrels.

How is the GRDR perceived in the zone?

It is an NGO which is already well-integrated and we believe that it can be a springboard to set up cross-border development activities. This is, according to us, it's most crucial mission.

Can the GRDR rely on the support of regional politicians?

Politicians that we are, have the responsibility to participate and raise awareness among the population in order to help them appropriate this project. I think that at this level, border radio stations must be used to disseminate information and raise awareness. We have laws and conventions but the population is unaware of them. The GRDR would be a guide and effective organiser because they have already made a place for themselves among the population. The good thing is that the projects exploiting the Basin's resources will occupy the population for 12 months out of the year. Keeping the population busy is key because conflicts are linked to poverty but mostly to idleness.

A project requires means, how can the politicians contribute at this level?

Politicians must convince the population to comply with the project. The expected means are not only financial, they are also human. With their volition, populations can contribute a lot to this […] project. It comes back to us, the politicians, to mobilise them around this opportunity which is the cross-border initiatives project.●

Brahima Samba Soumaré, Mayor of the Khabou commune (Mauritania).

Gaye Gandega, Mayor of the rural commune of Djélébou, Kayes Cercle (Mali).

Brahima Samba Soumaré

Gaye Gandega

"That which they are writing about now, we started long ago"

Would you please present your localities?

Brahima Samba Soumaré: The Khabou commune is the biggest of the 18 communes of Guidimaxa. Khabou. It is also on the border with Senegal because the Karakoro Basin links up with the Senegal River. Khabou is located in the south-east of Mauritania and has close to 32 000 inhabitants.

Gaye Gandega: The administrative centre of the Djélébou commune is the ex-arrondissement of Aorou, subdivided with the decentralisation into 3 communes: Djélébou, Karakoro and Sahel. It is located 67 km from Kayes to the North and 6 km from the first Mauritanian village to the east. The commune has approximately 21 000 inhabitants.
We benefited from decentralisation because we are a large area of migrants and we owe our entire socio-health infrastructure, in particular schools and health centres, to our migrants.

What are your commune's main resources?

Brahima Samba Soumaré: They are mostly natural resources, crops, jujube, baobab, Arabic gum.

Are you aware of co-habitation problems in the Basin?

Brahima Samba Soumaré: Even within a family, there are problems, there is even greater reason with thousands of families sharing two different administrations but rubbing elbows every day. We manage co-habitation problems peacefully.
There has not yet been a problem which has gone beyond communal authorities' or village committee's expertise. They are small daily problems which are resolved among ourselves. We are the same community, we are kin. For example, I have a sister, same father, same mother, married in Sanssané, a locality on the other side of the border in Mali. We have a border but we are the same people.
The people of my commune cross the border without problems to go to the neighbouring village to pick jujube, baobab and gum and even dead wood. Often even people on both riversides go together to plant a friend's or relative's field on the other side. We don't have borders.

Gaye Gandega: With Demba Thioye, the former mayor of my neighbouring Mauritanian commune, we have had to co-manage a problem which arose between Moorish camps and two of my villages. We brought together the camp leaders, my fellow mayor came with his advisors and together we identified the root of the problem and resolved it together within the family.

«We have a border but we are the same people.»

As an isolated zone, our closest basic food commodity supply centre is the Mauritanian villages across the way. For example, instead of going 67 km to Kayes to buy sugar at 17 000 CFA F, with cost of transport, it would cost a bit more than 20 000 F to return with the sugar. We prefer to go to our relatives next door which is 6 km away and costs 15 000 CFA F.
We maintain plenty of other trade examples. People from the other side come to our community health centre. For us, health has no border. During the vaccination campaigns, we don't distinguish between a Malian and a Mauritanian. People are there, let's vaccinate them. That's it.

Brahima Samba Soumaré: I confirm what my Malian counterpart has just said with the example of Gakora, a Malian village located 30 km from Khabou. Every Wednesday a motorised canoe which we call the "Gakora canoe" takes many of the ailing people to the heath centre in Gakora. However, we have a health centre in Khabou but people prefer the expertise of health care provider and the cost is less in Gakora. That is to the east.
To the west, there are also Malian health centres in Tapsirga and Kotéra which receive many of the patients from my commune. That is to say, that which they are writing about now, we started long ago.

What do you think of the GRDR?

Gaye Gandega: We have been with the GRDR for twenty or so years, since its creation. It was created in France by a migrants' association. It is in its element because it still focuses on cross-border integration. The GRDR was created to support us, the communes, and we owe the GRDR a lot with regard to in-depth surveys, the setting up of a conservation framework and supporting all of our development activities.
Let's not forget that the GRDR conceived of this Basin's concerted development project within the framework of the CIP. That is to say that its involvement is not in question.
What needs to be done now, this falls on us the beneficiaries, is to help the GRDR be more concrete in the interest of our populations. The populations are appreciative of concrete results and the GRDR has always been a trusted partner, among all the NGOs working in the region.
The GRDR and the Karakoro have been involved for over twenty years. The GRDR is the driver of this cross-border project and we have confidence in them. They are the best placed to manage our needs regarding roads, access to drinkable water, community radio stations, etc.

Brahima Samba Soumaré: The GRDR is also well received and integrated in our area. It's presence is already operational with the construction of two dams in Melgué and Sabousiri. It is the best partner to lead this project. Thanks to the GRDR we have an in-depth study which is the commune's identification as well as a priority action plan.

How could you contribute to the carrying out of this Karakoro initiative?

Brahima Samba Soumaré: Our populations can and are available to provide local labour. The GRDR knows that this human resource is a given.

Gaye Gandega: Populations' physical contribution is essential as they are the main beneficiaries of this project. They can also contribute financially and this would be a commune contribution of up to 3 000 Euros. They requested this project, they are not going to duck out now when there wish may come true. The programme responds to our needs and development here cannot be done without the populations' involvement.

«We don't distinguish between a Malian and a Mauritanian.»

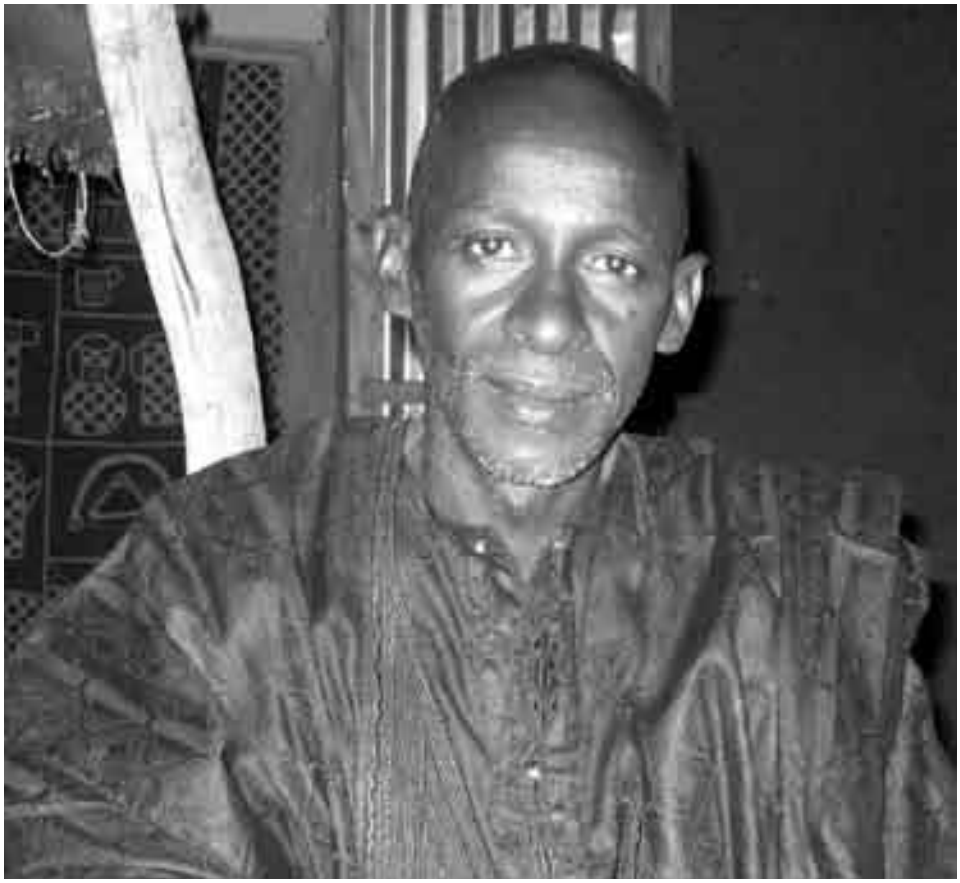
Diadje Samba Gandega: Mayor of the Baediam commune, Department of Sélibaby, Willaya (region) of Guidimakha, Mauritania.

Do you know another mayor whose name is also Gandega and lives on the other side of the border?

(Laughs): You are without a doubt taking about the mayor of Djélébou. That's my brother, same family and this is what's interesting about the cross-border area here. Relations have never been affected by the borders. The administrative identity makes us Malian or Mauritanian, distinguishing us on the basis of a border separating two distinct countries. But the etymological family remains and this blood-link is strengthened every day through marriage. The border has no influence on community relations. These relations go beyond the paper on which the borders are based.

The Karakoro Basin is thus a borderless space?

The name Karakoro is from my dialect, Soninké and it means "Xara koré", the big pond. It takes its source from the north of Baediam, in the Assaba region, more precisely in the village of Kankossa. And it flows into the Senegal River a few hundred metres from Khabou. Prior to independence, you couldn't say that it was a border because it cut across one country, not two, as it happens the Soninké country. It was one entity "Soninké country", a population established on both sides of the river, one entity thus with customs and traditions which remain.



«This cooperation is not new for us. It always existed on this part of the border between Mali and Mauritania. The same people, the same activities, populations strive to do everything together.»

"The border has no influence on community relations. These relations go beyond the paper on which the borders are based".

Is the promotion of cross-border cooperation welcome?

I am a champion of the idea. This advantage has to be revitalised, and even if there was a separation, barriers need to come down, the free movement of people and goods needs to be made a reality going beyond borders. This cooperation is not new for us. It always existed on this part of the border between Mali and Mauritania. The same people, the same activities, populations strive to do everything together.

Is this why populations are unaware of this border paradox?

Administratively, when populations are in contact without passing through a customs control post, fraud is suspected, that they are bypassing customs, the police. This happens daily. Coming and going from each side of the river is a daily occurrence and everyone accepts this as inherent fact of these peoples' reality. For example, the Malian village across from us, Nahaly, is known as large vegetable producer. The vegetables are widely consumed here because people from Baediam go there for provisions without formalities and without any intention of bypassing any customs control post. People go to and from the two villages naturally. With regard to health issues, populations also cross the river from one side to another to go to the clinic. The care of both clinics is just as good. Traditherapists also go from one side of the river to the other. The border is an aberration. The border is purely administrative and has absolutely no bearing on populations' relations.

Mrs. Habou Sylla, Deputy of Sélibaby and member of the National Human Rights Commission in Nouakchott.

What is Guidimaxa?

Guidimaxa is a region bordered by the Karakoro Basin, between Mali and Mauritania. The Karakoro Mauritanian border communes are those of Ould Yenge, Boully, Baediam, Khabou and Séfi.

What are the main activities of the Guidimaxa population?

Guidimaxa is a farming region with most rainfall in Mauritania. It is the country's granary, after rain-fed crops, there is garden marketing generally practiced by women organised in cooperatives.

What do you know of the GRDR?

It is an NGO which has been active in the region for a long time and works a lot with cooperatives and women's and men's organisations. It has good contact with the population and has initiated many activities.

"Populations are complying and can only support the GRDR"

Do you think that the population is ready for co-development?

These populations have almost everything in common and have lived together for a very long time; they are in contact regularly and have developed a certain solidarity. I know that the Mauritanian population on the riverbanks of the Karakoro go to the health clinics on the Malian side, and the Malian population farm land on the Mauritanian side.

How can the Basin populations contribute to the project's means needed?

The project's initiative emanates from the populations. This is to say that the populations are complying and can only support the GRDR because it involves a project that is going to strengthen their union on from ones side of the river to the other. I believe that they are capable of being mobilised around this project which belongs to them and which has been provided at the institutional level.

What is the role of women politicians, which you are?

First to participate in all the debates concerning the populations and listen. Then I provide them with precise information concerning them because that is who elected me. It is up to us to provide them with the elements to convince them and involve them throughout.

Is the cross-border issue in your debates in the National Assembly?

We are currently in the midst of the cross-border issue in Parliament with the problem of the 1989 deportees to Senegal. Riverside populations have the same rights as others and they cannot be ignored. The time has come to strengthen links which have always united the populations beyond a border which are furthermore totally artificial for the border populations.●

Lieutenant Colonel Mamadou Diallo, Governor of the Kayes Region (Mali).

How do you situate the Kayes region with regard to the Karakoro Basin?

The Basin is in the Kayes region itself which is composed of 7 circles. All of the region believes that the name Karakoro is Malian, from Kayes.

Can it be said that lives of the region's population depend on the Karakoro Basin?

That would be a bit exaggerated because the Kayes circle has about 29 communes and the region has 129. In Mali, the Karakoro Basin only includes 4 communes altogether. For its 4 communes or more, the Karakoro is a basin of life for which a solution must be found. It matters that Malians and Mauritanians can take full advantage of this basin and in perfect symbiosis. Everyone knows that, for now, this part of the border is not operational and there is still a lot of friction. There have been a lot of meetings and proposals and we believe that by making the border zone an area in which the exchanging of information, economic, social and cultural promotion come together, the Basin's development can be a great promoter of integration, for a reprieve. The advantage is that, on both sides of the border, it involves the same population, the same families, and the same relatives.

How is the administrations relationship with the GRDR?

For us, overall, NGOs are the development partners and in such a way that we get along well and have the same objectives. With the GRDR, as with every other partner, we have a close relationship because their activities are in favour of the population. We operate as an administrator as we have the responsibility of promoting favourable living conditions, thus we share the same objectives. We should know what the NGOs do and try to collaborate with them at the regional level as well as with locally-elected officials promoting decentralisation. We collaborate with the GRDR in addition to their intervention in the Karakoro Basin.

"By making the border zone an area in which the exchanging of information, economic, social and cultural promotion come together, the Basin's development can be great promoter of integration …"

Is concerted development well-defined with regard to the Karakoro Basin?

Trade is already a tradition among populations around the Basin. They are the same people, the big brother is there, and the cousin is on the other side. Whatever the problem, everyone is obligated to see each other, to get along, to understand each other. If the project provides better conditions that will be an improvement to what exists today, trade, integration and active solidarity.

Administrations say that with regard to the development initiative everything is a priority and that there is a lack of funds. However, the project will require a serious push. How can the Governorate contribute?

The essential is that we want this project, we want it to be successful thus we are going to deal with this. Besides, we didn't wait for it to arrive, we already included the development of the Karakoro Basin in our strategic regional development plan. We are thus going to start lobbying our partners because the regional strategic plan must be shown to our partners who are many. Then, we believe that for the Karakoro Basin, it is the population who through modest contributions or not will make the overtures. Developing the Karakoro Basin is a unifying project●

Demba Thiam: Coordinator of the "Guidimaxa Jikvé" Association (or "Hope of Guidimaxa"), Chairman of the GRDR's Strategic Orientation Committee in Kayes.

"The Karakoro project should implicate women and youth whom we should try to keep from leaving."

What is the "Guidimaxa Jikvé" Association?

The Association was created in 1988 on the recommendation of migrants based in Seine Saint Denis, France. Migrant activities with the GRDR also began in 1988. The main areas to focus on were migrants' access to health care, education and water. An association was needed in order to coordinate this at the local level, hence the "Guidimaxa Jikvé" Association was created. It means "hope of Guidimaxa". Guidimaxa is a geographic area in the Malian and Mauritanian Karakoro Basin. Our Association works along with migrants and covers 3 Malian communes in the northwest region of Kayes: the Djélébou, Karakoro and the Sahel. The Association is also involved with promoting work for women through market gardening. The Karakoro project should implicate women and youth whom we should try to keep from leaving.

How do you explain the younger generation's desire to go abroad?

I would say that this temptation is linked to us and our customs. The Soninké have always been great travellers. Then, there were the disastrous situations in 1973-74, and again in 1983-84 which exacerbated this leaving frenzy. The great exoduses took place during these two periods, from Dakar.

On what do the Basin's populations live?

First, on what the migrants have brought in to the area. Without this, the Basin region, at the edge of the desert with nothing to keep the younger generation, would be a ghost town.

With decentralisation, are government officials more involved in the management of migrants' contribution?

Most of migrants' investments (health clinics, schools, hydro facilities) occurred prior to decentralisation and now, with GRDR support, emphasis is placed on everyone's cooperation with regard to expertise in order to bring development programmes to fruition.

Do you believe that the Basin's management should be shared by Malians and Mauritanians?

There is no choice. The relationships between the Basin's populations are such that they prevail also between Malian and Mauritanian migrants of the Karakoro zone. Even far away, in France, they get together and agree on numerous issues regarding the Basin's development.

What is the difference between the involvement of the Association and that of the GRDR?

Above all, from France the GRDR has worked with migrants from the outset, in particular regarding awareness-raising and training of the first associative leaders among migrants, associative organisations as well as the development of intervention plans in the Basin. The GRDR initiated this dynamic and we support them. It is true that with decentralisation, the GRDR has been too geared towards the communes. We have reminded them not to forget civil society.

What do you think of the cross-border project?

We maintain only that civil society and associations should not lag behind. They are essential to the project even though we are kept a bit at a distance from the development process and its culmination. We have the impression that politicians tend to monopolise them. For example, we were neither informed nor participated in the launching of the Bamako project.

NB: GRDR desk supports that "All the stages of the initiative were object of a wide exchange through the organization of meetings at different level: institutional, local actors and, the distribution of the reports in all the Communes concerned by the initiative".

"The EU has a basic internal interest in cross-border issues."

Anne Simon: Programme Officer, Delegation of the European Commission in Mauritania.

What is the European Union's interest in local development through cross-border cooperation?

Local development through cross-border cooperation is in line with European Union's (EU) view where the interest in cross-border issues is something internal: it is the EU's view of development in general. Constitutively and structurally, the EU was built on the economic then social convergence along with the adherence of populations. It was mainly coordinated in border zones, often areas of mistrust, but in any case fundamental in building the EU. These zones are very important in terms of trade. Integrated European programmes work on stimulating this enormous cross-border potential. The EU has a basic internal interest in cross-border issues. In its relations with Africa, the EU's strategy has evolved towards providing support to important structuring issues.

In the particular case of Mauritania, the Karakoro Initiative fits in well with EU priorities on several levels: decentralisation is an important sector of the 10th EDF in terms also of managing the vulnerability of populations participating in migratory flows and, simply, in terms of poverty reduction. In several ways, this initiative is particularly interesting within the framework of EU-Mauritanian cooperation.

How could the EU contribute to this initiative?

The Regional Indicative Programme, 10th EDF currently being prepared, foresees, a priori, a cross-border component which indicates that there is financing opportunity. It is too early to mention amounts, but what is important is that cross-border issues continue to be a priority and this project is on the Malian and Mauritanian Governments' agendas. The Regional Indicative Programme operates as it does at the national level, which means joint programming and management. The 10th EDF agreement framework in which cross-border issues are only a small aspect will be signed at the end of the 1st semester of 2008. Realistically, financial commitments will be identified and financing will only begin at the end of 2009. It will thus be important to find financing solutions in order to begin.

Can the EU intervene at this level?

There are mechanisms that can facilitate financing of launching activities.

Moctar Ould El Hacen: Professor at the University of Nouakchott, specialist in territorial planning and the environment, advisor to the Mauritanian Minister of Decentralisation and Territorial Planning.

"The project's strong point lies within the fact that the GRDR was able to mobilise all the actors."

After the ritual of the launching of the Karakoro initiative, can we still be optimistic?

The GRDR made great strides as it succeeded in getting regional actors to talk to each other including two important actors, the State and its services, which include the army, law enforcement, customs and the police.
This supports the concept of no development without security. Another important fact is to have gotten the villagers to talk who are no longer limited to speaking only in traditional spaces (under the palaver tree).
They are very effective in managing situations, especially now that they use mobile telephones increasing and accelerating communication. These actors must be taken into account. The village chiefs are the first managers of cross-border areas. Their system is rather informal but they obtain more results in managing affairs than government officials who must refer to a superior. Now that everyone is united, we can be optimistic. And I don't think this optimism is exaggerated because at the meeting in Bamako it was recommended that this experience be extended along the 2400 km linking Mauritania and Mali.

Karakoro is still a important migration zone although the majority of the younger generation - the active population, has left. Even thought the project has mobilised funding, who is going to do the work?

I have always said that our problem is not the mobilisation of funds, but management which I call the "rural environment crisis", a production and use of space crisis. There is a crisis in the productive force. In villages there are only old people and some women which raises the problem of a social framework. We need a department responsible for the social framework in order to get people to work. The government can mobilise all the funds possible, it can even allocate the money. There will be those who will say that they do not want to be involved or are going to get involved only to put money in their pocket and disappear.
There is the problem of immigration, but especially the disintegration of solidarity, of community effort, and this shared development which was working in the villages.
Projects are failing due to lack of community-based response. It is a failure of appropriation and this is even worse in urban areas.
African human values which were the force of our societies have been lost. Now, local development requires the social framework as much as territorial development which is the combined management of space and society.
If the younger generation is migrating, even clandestinely towards fictitious utopias, it is because their surroundings are not giving them what they need.
Materialism and individualism reigns and when you hear the word "project", people hear "money".

When we speak of “development”, people understand “money”.

Is the project thus seen as a failure?

The project’s strong point lies within the fact that the GRDR was able to mobilise all the actors. But there must be much awareness-raising among villagers in order to demonstrate that the technical framework and the need for solidarity are important than the financial aspect.

Will the project survive the political upheavals and the changing of the decision-makers? What will politicians’ commitment be consistent?

I believe that the Karakoro initiative needs pilot actions quickly without waiting for financing by 2009-2010. While awaiting whatever donor financing for activities in 2008 to be achieved, I think the GRDR would do well, with the support of the two States, to carry out an activity like potable water supply which links up two villages (one Malian, the other Mauritanian) on either side of the Karakoro basin.
These villages would organise a celebration to inaugurate their water supply by opening up the water tap at the same time on each side. Villagers prefer to see results rather than hear what we are going to do for them. With regard to the project’s survival, I believe that fortunately the Malian and Mauritanian supporters of this project know each other and, whatever minister is in office, the government and technical officials will always be there to support the follow through and achievement of what has already begun going beyond the politicians and their functions●

One Malian village and a Mauritanian one on either side of the Karakoro basin; these villages would organise a celebration to inaugurate their water supply by opening up the water tap at the same time on each side. Villagers prefer to see results rather than hear what we are going to do for them.

The GRDR has much experience and is very clear in the way in which it operates. It knows that it must keep its commitments.

Arezki Harkouk, Director of the GRDR's Africa Programmes (Groupe de recherche et de réalisations pour le développement rural).

With the GRDR, migrants go further than being the money supplier to their families via Western Union or any other means. How has this particularity of migrants been created in the Mali-Mauritania-Senegal region?

Arezki Harkouk in dialogue with Yahya ould Kebd, the Mauritanian Minister of Decentralisation and Territorial Planning.

The GRDR is an NGO begun towards the end of the 1960s by young men working abroad in lieu of their military service. This was the time of the beginning of the severe droughts and the intense appeals by the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) to fight hunger in Sahel countries. The GRDR was thus set up by these young people in the Senegal River Basin with families of migrants who left for France. Upon their return to France, they met the migrants and set up an association. There were 6 founders of whom were three migrants and three young men who had worked abroad.
One of the founders continued to work in the Senegal River Valley until very recently.

Basically, the GRDR is an association which supports migrants in France to help them integrate into the job market. There were many of them because the river basin area is a tremendous migration zone, in particular the Soninké people.

The GRDR supported migrants in France so that they could handle social issues but with regard to their villages of origin in terms of projects initiated. With the droughts, the migrants responded greatly to demands by their families remaining in the village: providing support for them to carry out minor works to protect their land, remittances for subsistence, advocacy organisations.

The GRDR's second phase set up an outpost in the field. In addition to establishing a centre in France, they supported projects launched in France and transferred to the village.

Towards the end of the 1970s, beginning of the 1980s, an operational approach was set up in the field with a small outpost: one person, one motorcycle and a mechanic/driver who travelled throughout the basin to support village and inter-village migrant associations starting associations that would be undertaking development actions in their villages of origin.
Little by little, the dynamic grew including more people.
By the end of the 1980s, beginning of the 1990s, this approach led to the setting up of financial instruments, cooperative organisations, and strengthening the associative structure in the Senegal River basin and Casamance in the Ziguinchor region.

Rural development was paramount but towards the 1990s social sectors, notably health and education were being addressed. This was followed up in France through programmes which supported migrants in integration or insertion centres.
In accordance with French government policies, the GRDR adapted in order to provide support to migrant associations with regard to the recognition of their rights.

Did the countries of origin also adapt to the changing policies?

The GRDR is not a militant blow-the-whistle type of association. It focuses more on a technical role. Although it has had to take political positions from time to time, it has always been known for its technical aspect to the extent where it has been accused of being too conciliatory to government policies.
Its mission has always been fundamentally to support migrants' initiatives, to work with them directly while trying to maintain a "neutral" position.

Coming back to the evolution of the GRDR

Up until the end of the 1990s, flexible funds supported an associative movement somewhat everywhere. These rural development programmes, notably in Senegal and France-solidarity programmes in Kayes, Mali supported access to health care and the quality of healthcare in the rural environment and, later, the HIV/AIDS issue.

At the end of the 1990s, the GRDR started the third phase of its evolution, going beyond the cooperative approach, following this with a movement of all of the development partners.
The GRDR adapted taking a position on local development by strengthening decentralisation policies but not without difficulties and conflicts with grass-roots organisations.

«Basically, the GRDR is an association which supports migrants in France to help them integrate into the job market.»

But, it had to fight, to readapt its discourse, integrate poverty reduction and continue to exist within the institutional landscape and also to find necessary resources for its programmes.

Numerous associative actors joined politics, became elected and wanted the GRDR to continue to support them. This was a way to integrate poverty reduction on a greater scale, but also States' decentralisation policies by which the GRDR abided: "it is at the local level where there was a merging and coordination of actors' involvement and mobilisation geared towards regionally-based development."

Since the beginning of 2000, the GRDR has developed a programme in support of local development initiatives which has at times been very successful in terms of methodology and advocacy; methodologically local development is demonstrated with the increasing involvement of evermore actors and it was lacking in this area. The GRDR worked on implementation tools to facilitate the local development process.

Today, we see in the sub-region (Mali, Mauritania, Senegal) a strong return to the local development concept. In all modesty, I believe that the GRDR has been greatly responsible for positioning the local development concept as a major issue alongside decentralisation policies.

Within the framework of these local development issues, the GRDR has been able to reaffirm its mission and its identity, in African and in France, with regard to migration. Since 2003, with its "citizenship" development, the GRDR has been more involved at the local level as an actor: the citizens, migrants' status as temporary not permanent but just a stage. We leave a country of which we are a citizen and arrive in a country of which we must become a citizen.

Within this framework, according to the GRDR, the meeting on co-development had much impact with regard to intellectual discourse, for the promotion of co-development.
In addition migrants who are transferring funds, there are migrants, citizens, passing borders but they are also actors who can encourage a joining together of the territories. Thus, a migrant who mobilises his community in France to set up a network of those of his village in the Kayes region (Mali), of Guidimaxa (Mauritania) and Tambacounda (Senegal) has greater value added than the money that he sends daily for a development project.
In addition to financial solidarity, he mobilises solidarity of experiences and know-how. He generates a dynamic for territorial development in its entirety. This bringing together of lands gives him a more enhancive position and is easier to bring about than simply a provider of funds.

How did you develop this vision of cross-border development actions?

Within the local development process, the GRDR is never idle and it needed to change scales.
Currently we are working with 34 local communities within the framework of PAIDEL (Programme d'appui aux initiatives de développement local) and CODEV (éducation au développement en direction des migrants vivant en Europe), a programme encouraging and supporting migrants in the building of partnerships and raising European public awareness to migrants' actual role.

We had to change scales, both at the local level, going from community level to a broader group, department, circle or region.

«It had to fight, to readapt its discourse, integrate poverty reduction and continue to exist within the institutional landscape and also to find necessary resources for its programmes.»

In our development process, we needed a wider geographic range of issues, to go to the cross-border level.
Our area of involvement was conducive to this approach. We were involved on all sides, going from Mali to Mauritania and to Senegal. Our border activities

«In our development process, we needed a wider geographic range of issues, to go to the cross-border level.»

can no longer go further at the institutional level, notably as in the Karakoro. Partnerships between private actors or between associations have been created, but not between communities. However, we are easily creating partnerships with Northern communities. Thus we have wondered why a Malian commune cannot create a partnership with a Mauritanian commune in the Karakoro zone.

Actors have traded amongst each other; they have arrived at the same conclusion by saying: "we want to municipalities to cooperate, to have agreements for shared management of this territory which is found straddling a border." We have seen that officials have shown interest in supporting this dynamic. But we have also noticed that, despite all the protocols and border population reports, there is no framework officialising trade, and thus no way of envisaging shared projects.

«We are going to do our best to capitalise on the tools that other operations can disseminate. »

Based on a request by actors in 2003, we said to ourselves, "why not a cross-border project?" And we were encouraged by the dynamic initiated by the Sahel and West Africa Club, the DNF and ENDA-Diapol in West Africa.
We have caught up with this strategic thinking and thus the CIP (Cross-border Initiatives Programme) with the advantage that the GRDR is involved on both sides in three countries, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal.

Now, how to manage this momentum which includes many actors and thus various ways to see and do?

In every planning operation, it is hoped that the majority will comply and get something out of it. The GRDR with the States are preparing projects. The Karakoro initiative is thus the delegated contractor and it is at this level which makes it a pilot project. It is a classic approach, except that it involves two States and actors of both States have to be involved.
In the institutional plan that we presented in Bamako, we tried to define the place of each actor in order to preserve the programme's uniqueness.
The GRDR is like the project manager based on the defined activities and in which each actor should be involved, notably regarding awareness-raising and local coordination. There is also subcontracting to carry out the work which will require the involvement of private businesses and decentralised technical services.

There is a reason for exchanging knowledge and experiences among technical services on both sides of the border; a willingness to exchange between community actors and civil society. Some international and sub-regional expertise will be mobilised. I believe that this complementarity, coordination between the various levers is what is sought in the basin.

Populations' expectations are going to have to be managed which are not always compatible with operational delays.

The GRDR has much experience and is very clear in the way in which it operates. It knows that it must keep its

Grdr and Karakoro

Sacred vows

It is difficult to find a better guide than the GRDR to understand the Karakoro basin. We left Kayes, Mali to go to Sélibaby in Guidimaxa, Mauritania, the two capitals of the shared basin. The trip from Kayes to Sélibaby is a worthy adventure of a proven route. Sélibaby is 60 km from the Malian border, and 700 km from the capitals of Nouakchott and Bamako, and 1000 km from Dakar. The trip's length however is not a question of distance. In this area, every place is far away because there are so few roads and they are in poor condition.
On the road from Kayes to Sélibaby the driver drives wherever he wants and wherever he can depending upon the condition of the ground. The GRDR works in this isolated and difficult to access zone. It has worked in the Guidimaxa region since 1989 on horizontal programmes, focusing mainly on 2 areas: food security and the promotion of available resources. It operates in 12 of the 18 communes of the Guidimaxa region.

The GRDR is known all along the Karakoro, in the middle valley of the Senegal River and in particular in the locales of Aourou, Nahaly, Lea, Baediam, Boully, Ould Yenge. In Soninké, Moor or Fulani, the name is the same and needs no translation. On the banks of the Karakoro, it is an NGO. Enough said. "It is an NGO that does a lot for us." The GRDR is indeed integrated into most of the infrastructures operating in villages. The associative fabric also claims to be representative of the GRDR. Village associations, grass-roots organisations, producer groups have been recipients and continue to work within the GRDR's technical framework.

The GRDR 's is based in Montreuil (Paris, France), but its identity is found in the heart of the Karakoro basin. It is here, at the edge of the desert where this uplifting story unfolds of a meeting between young French working abroad in lieu of their military service and migrants of the river basin. With African independences, these Senegalese, Malians

commitments. This said I believe that it must be put in perspective to avoid all rabblerousing.
The actors of Karakoro have been mobilised with a clear discourse and we cannot be fearful that this will incite interest. Now, it is not only up to the GRDR. Lobbying for Karakoro began a long time ago and continues.
It is not because we have produced a document that financing will follow. I find that this concern put forward in Bamako that the populations will become impatient a bit theoretical. My response is that the GRDR is fully invested, that it works in the area as much in Guidimaxa as in Mali and the Karakoro initiative would be the structuring project for the border area.
Much remains to be done to make actors aware of the importance of this border area in terms of planning.

All of the insourcing and the dynamic raise a serious challenge to the GRDR more than financing. The Karakoro project is not a GRDR project. Far from it! The GRDR is the project manager, today, to put its experience to work at a certain level, when it involves implementing this programme, the local actors will be the main actors.
This involves a pilot operation and we are going to do our best to capitalise on the tools that other operations can disseminate.
I also believe that the Malian and Mauritanian authorities are expecting these tools (as in more than one); administration production tools, legal tools, for conceptualising joint actions, contracting tools for collaboration between administrative technical services, continuity of sectoral policies, etc●

and Mauritanians seized the opportunity for labourers needed in France. Originally seasonal migrants in the groundnut basin in Senegal, they changed their course heading for Marseille. But there is a great difference between growing groundnut and working the machines. GRDR's original idea was to help and train migrants to work in France. One of the three founders, Jacques Dubois, in his eighties today, is still involved in associative work in Bakel (Senegal) in surface water development.

Among the first GRDR initiating immigrants, many returned to their country and entered into politics such as Ibrahima Thioye, from Melgué, Mauritania; Ibrahim Traoré, Mayor of Kolimbiné, Mali; Moussa Cissé, Deputy to the National Assembly in Mali; Kedel Diallo, Senegalese mayor then deputy; Banganda Sakho, Mayor of Kotiari and coordinator of the inter-community of the Bakel Department.
After providing support to migrants in host countries, the GRDR developed its main mission: to support migrants' efforts in village communities in their countries of origin. In practice, migrants conceive their projects and the GRDR provides technical support. The drought in the Sahel in 1973-1983 accelerated the process and provided the GRDR with a certain stature. There was difficulty in providing aid to families who were remobilising migrants towards purchasing, potable water, health and development cooperatives.

In 1973-74, the first wave of migrants returned to put to use their knowledge acquired with French farmers with support from the GRDR. Projects were begun and financed in order to set up irrigated areas within the poverty reduction framework by producing cereal at home. Since, the GRDR has taken on another stature, adapting each time to the context in order to continue to be effective. It has grown into a European centre based in Paris, an African centre based in Nouakchott, Mauritania and outposts in Bakel, Senegal; Kayes, Mali and; Sélibaby, Mauritania.
It took our skilled driver one full day to finally enter Guidimaxa through Baediam. It is a peaceful rural commune managed by the very nice mayor, Diadje Samba Gandega, an intellectual educated in former USSR universities. In this village, food and lodging was again paid for by the GRDR and its guests. One night of rest and then we were off towards Sélibaby via Boully and Ould Yenge. Another day we crossed the Savannah where we could see traces of carts, scooters and cattle but there was no road, only paths which would allow carts to pass.

However, this Guidimaxa region is specific in Mauritania. It is one of the richest in natural resources in the region. Its soil is favourable to farming and it receives the most rainfall in the country, although its average is only 300 mm^3 per year. Paradoxically, Guidimaxa is also the poorest region in Mauritania, where more than 78 % of the population is poor, of which 50 % are living under the poverty line and more than 36% live in extreme poverty.
Guidimaxa's population's revenue is earned from livestock and farming but is diminishing due to the degradation of resources. It is not surprising that Guidimaxa is an emigration space. There are approximately 75 000 migrants out of a total population of 204 663. Their financial contribution is enormous but difficult to calculate.
If we use the hypothesis that 50% of these migrants send at least 30 000 Ouguiya per month to their families (approximately 50 000 CFA F), there is close to a billion Ouguiya (or 1 billion 2 to 6 Cfa) per month coming from nationals of this region living somewhere in Europe (France, Italy, Spain). Their financial support is a tremendous contribution to the household. It is more significant than local production, greater than the monetization of local economies. Not wanting to make a mistake, Alassane Thioye, acting coordinator of the GRDR outpost in Sélibaby, confided, "without this contribution, life would be impossible in Guidimaxa."●

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