



A Territorial Foresight for Sikasso

Informing Sustainable Regional Development in Mali

Key findings and conclusions – November 2021

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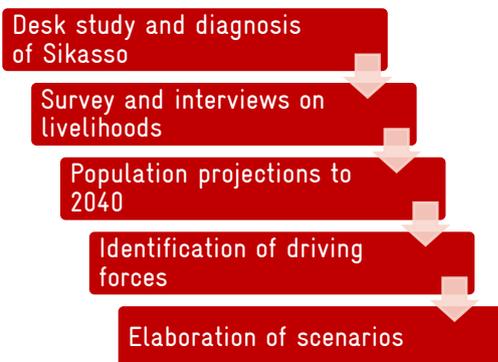


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Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa is confronted with context-specific challenges which should be addressed through territorial approaches and foresight. The region is characterized by a predominantly rural population, an uneven demographic transition, an important role of agriculture, the absence of strong industrialization processes and a high growth rate of provincial towns. The simultaneous growth of small and medium-sized towns contributes to territorial imbalances as the development of functional infrastructure lags behind. Most sub-Saharan countries are at a crossroads of rural transformation, facing a blurring of the rural-urban divide. The GIZ Sector Project Sustainable Rural Areas facilitated the elaboration of this territorial foresight in cooperation with the GIZ project "Support of the National Programme for Sustainable Small-Scale Irrigation" in Mali.

The future of rural areas is diverse and full of contrasts. The primary objective of the territorial foresight is to support inhabitants of Sikasso region, local authorities and technical services in their strategic thinking and regional planning. The method of the study is divided into five phases.



Political support is the prerequisite and starting point of the methodology. Local stakeholder endorsement was ensured through formal preparatory meetings. The nature of the study and its potential benefits for the region were discussed. The team in charge of the study involved the technicians of the regional council, its secretary general, representatives from civil society and the local population.

Previous strategic documentation, available at the Regional Council, was completed and updated through a systemic diagnosis. Results from a household survey on livelihood issues and population projections, served as the basis for developing various scenarios. The most influential

factors for the development of Sikasso region were identified as driving forces.

A territorial approach is defined here as a place-based, integrated and holistic approach, giving full consideration to multi-dimensional and cross-sectorial aspects. The territory is a system, composed of different economic sectors, value-chains, assets and resources, social and cultural groups and characteristics, etc. Its development therefore requires a systemic perspective.

Territorial foresight is defined here as the application of anticipatory approaches to a specific geographic space identified as territory. The goal is to understand the range of opportunities and constraints in order to define and implement forward-looking, locally based, and coherent strategies for development. It is about exploring alternative pathways to understand potential scenarios for better planning. The aspirations and knowledge of the local population are at the forefront, in order to gain insights on how to move towards a more desirable future.

Sikasso today

The diagnosis showed the following characteristics of the region:

- Demography has a huge influence on the region's development.
- The whole territory is densifying with an urbanization dynamic that sees constant expansion of rural villages and towns into urban agglomerations. Out-migration from the region is low.
- The quality of basic infrastructure both of rural and urban areas is insufficient for coping with the on-going transformations associated with demography and densification.
- The economy and employment in the services sector (tertiary sector) relies heavily on informal regulations.
- The region is economically "trapped" in primary specialisation, with a dependence on cotton and the gold economy, both regulated from outside Sikasso.
- Cereal yields stagnate or even decline, while agricultural diversification is low, partly due to limited and inefficient support.

- The diversification of food production and local processing is hampered by insufficient market infrastructure and a non-conducive economic environment.
- Decentralisation induces organisational, institutional and political challenges given the partition of the former Sikasso region into three newly established regions (Sikasso, Bougouni, Koutiala).
- Lack of security, related to both terrorism and crime is a pressing issue with multidimensional facets.

The surveys covered 300 households and 30 key informants from civil society, farmers organizations, trade unions, private sector and commerce associations as well as local authorities. They highlighted the following aspects:

- In contrast to the agricultural potential and mineral wealth of the Sikasso region, households remain comparatively poor and are characterized by an insufficient endowment of household goods.
- Agriculture has a consistently high relevance for economic activities in the region.
- Large families make up a significant part of the population and are usually associated with higher living standards than the smaller families. This results from a better ability to diversify their livelihood strategies.
- Despite family planning efforts a high birth rate prevails, which indicates that the demographic growth will not slow down.
- Plot sizes per land user for agricultural production are shrinking due to increasing population pressure.
- There is a high desire for mobility, especially among the younger population. However, there is a discrepancy between the motivation to move (e.g., public sector employment) and the economic reality of those who have already moved (mainly informal tertiary sector employment).

Demographic projections are important to understand the current development trends in Sikasso and identify future challenges for regional planning. In 2009, 2.6 million people lived in Sikasso. Assuming an increase in life expectancy, regional population projections for

2040 range between 5.5 and 6.7 million. Even under the low projection, 82,000 young people would enter the labour market annually, compared to 51,000 today. The high projection adds an additional 10,000 people annually. The latter would mean that more than 1.3 million jobs would have to be created by 2040. Similarly, these projections also point at a growing pressure on land and natural resources as well as on health and education infrastructure.

Anticipating Sikasso's future

The joint scenario development involved 25 resource-persons, representing the key informants previously identified. In two one-week workshops, they worked together on the findings and projections presented above. The participants identified seven driving forces affecting the future of Sikasso.

The seven driving forces

- The state of security
- The situation of the gold economy
- The condition of hydro-agricultural facilities
- The state of territorial governance
- The state of social cohesion
- The local orientations and financing of development
- The status of women and youth

Based on the driving forces, alternative scenarios for Sikasso in 2040 were identified in the workshops.

The driving forces are of great significance for Sikasso's development at a long-term perspective. Therefore, the Foresight identified issues of strategic importance within each driving force, so-called Tipping points. Those again suggest options or entry points to lever a sustainable development of the Sikasso region.

<p>The status of women and youth in decision-making processes.</p>	<p><i>Tippling point:</i> Promoting gender equality in public life. Developing the skills of women and young people to access positions of responsibility and in society.</p>	<p><i>Potential lever:</i> Promote local initiatives that support women and young people build capacity.</p>
<p>Social cohesion: The capacity of individuals and groups to live and act together in the region.</p>	<p><i>Tippling point:</i> Enhance public awareness for collective activities. All actors in the region should gain knowledge on how to create and integrate communities.</p>	<p><i>Potential lever:</i> Local initiatives (forum of social organizations) and cultural initiatives for safeguarding and maintain traditional values. Intergenerational framework for prevention and management of community conflicts.</p>
<p>Governance: Explicit and/or implicit principles and rules governing decision making and their implementation regarding the management of the region.</p>	<p><i>Tippling points:</i> The capacity of locally elected representatives to realize the aspirations of the population. The possibility of having local resources to implement them.</p>	<p><i>Potential lever:</i> Support and disseminate existing accountability monitoring approaches. Support CSOs engaged in civic monitoring.</p>
<p>Gold economy: The importance and mode of operation of gold mining in the region.</p>	<p><i>Tippling point:</i> The degree of enforcement of gold mining legislation with specific social and environmental standards.</p>	<p><i>Potential lever:</i> Support the Chamber of Mines to regulate gold mining and support citizens' initiatives for transparency.</p>
<p>Development priorities and funding: Priorities for action and investment by local public authorities. Availability of local public and private financial resources for the implementation of local policies.</p>	<p><i>Tippling points:</i> Capacities of local authorities to coordinate and manage development actions. Political motivation to establish a fair and equitable administration respecting the public interest. The capacity of civil society to fulfil its role as surveillant for government accountability. Systematic use of accountability routines and procedures.</p>	<p><i>Potential lever:</i> Support existing accountability monitoring approaches (CCAP) and disseminate them widely. Support CSOs engaged in civic monitoring.</p>
<p>Security: The state of people's and goods' security in the territory.</p>	<p><i>Tippling points:</i> Balance between four elements: a) coordination with neighboring countries, b) population's involvement in security, c) relevant skills and resources of authorities and respective staff, d) complementarity between local defense and security initiatives and the implication of national security forces.</p>	<p><i>Potential lever:</i> Promote awareness of security issues among the population and their active participation in security monitoring. Focus on the safety of the population.</p>

Hydro-agricultural equipment: The Status of hydro-agricultural facilities and related infrastructure (for agriculture, livestock, fishing, etc.) and their management.

Tipping points: The demand for investment by the population in the management of hydro-agricultural equipment, particularly with regard to water management capacities.

Potential lever: Build on the example of management committees, which are already operating effectively. Provide support and strengthen management committees.

Key messages

The following key messages have been drawn from the study. They were discussed during the workshops and are informed by the findings of the diagnosis and surveys. They aim at inspiring the processes of policy development, program design as well as individual and collective action.

Local authorities in Sikasso and the decentralized government services have regional planning procedures in place. The findings and key messages from the Foresight are intended to contribute to regional planning processes in Sikasso by highlighting topics of strategic importance for the people of Sikasso and the wider region as such.

The quality of governance and institutions

The strength and quality of institutions is one of the levers of change. In Mali's political context, reinforcing confidence in its institutions appears to be a prerequisite for any strategic thinking. The fight against corruption, the effective implementation of existing laws and regulations, the mobilization of development financing and the accountability of decision-makers have been repeatedly emphasized as indispensable for a robust development planning. Public institutions are not the only ones concerned. Civil society and professional organizations were also mentioned by participants. The diagnosis reveals that they also have a leading role to play in restoring confidence in public and collective action.

Despite the limits of decentralization, local leeway exists but is insufficiently used. Calls for institutional relocation from the public and private sector deserve attention. The transformative potential of better coordinated CSOs or more autonomous local agricultural and agri-food enterprises has been widely emphasized. The administrative reorganization into new regions, even if it entails risks of loss of autonomy and fragmentation of public action, is also an opportunity to strengthen the regional institutions of the three administrative units of

Bougouni, Koutiala and Sikasso, provided that coherence is maintained.

Security as a lever for development and institutional transformation

The security issue is a tipping point of high strategic importance. Even if the risks are currently not as high as in other parts of the country, the regional risks from the rise of terrorism and banditry are numerous: Social disintegration, mistrust and suspicion towards refugees moving to Sikasso from other parts of the country; economic recession with constrained companies and smallholders and inactive regional markets; institutional and legal risks, diminishing power of local organizations and the decreasing access to basic services; environmental risks, limited access to natural resources and noncompliance with existing regulations (especially for gold mining).

The study clearly showed high significance of security for regional development processes in Sikasso. If regional organizations and institutions (in coordination and agreement with their national counterparts) act together to fight insecurity and its root causes, then this synergy can be a decisive factor for change. To date, insecurity has been addressed incoherently, with an almost exclusive focus on military intervention. There are certainly options for a more cross-sectoral, participatory and inclusive approach.

Controversies around youth and women in decision making

Youth and women are rarely involved in decision-making in the region. The study recognizes the transformative potential of this issue. There are different opinions on the risks and benefits of governance and public decision-making that would include women and youth.

First: The risk of loss of identity, and the associated erosion of social cohesion if power is distributed more broadly.

Second: Enhanced progress through the distribution of power, especially in driving expected changes in governance and the strengthening of institutions.

This indicates that the activation of this driving force is not self-evident, and could justify fostering public debates, including on a regional scale.

The need to formalize and regulate the gold economy

The Foresight points to the importance of the gold economy – both today and tomorrow. Artisanal gold mining is, after agriculture, the main employment sector in the region. The gold economy can potentially generate financial resources and enhance the economic diversification of the region.

The sector is a cause of serious concern. From a social point of view, the safety problems and the precarious working conditions must be looked at more closely. From an economic point of view, the lack of economic benefits for the local population should be looked at critically. This is also reflected in the low average household incomes in the region. From an ecological point of view, the conversion of land in to mining-ground, environmental pollution and its consequences for biodiversity will require serious attention.

The gold economy is a perfect example of the asymmetries between the actors involved and the inadequacies of local and state institutions, including current governance. Legal and regulatory frameworks are in place in the region. However, informal regulations at the local level keep state institutions and regional authorities from managing the sector. Moreover, multinational corporations at industrial sites negotiate long-term exploitation rights only with national authorities. Thus, regional authorities have neither financial resources nor instruments to promote and manage development at the regional level. Artisanal gold mining, with its recently established small-scale operations, is starkly affected by these shortcomings.

A need to renew the agricultural model

Agriculture dominates the region's economy and will do so for some time to come. Currently, there are pending key questions regarding this sector. For example, while the substitution of millet by maize is proven, local authorities suggested that attention should also be paid to the decline of sorghum production. Also, the dependence on cotton as a cash crop is controversial as the

cotton economy is subject to price volatility and public subsidies. The sustainability of the cotton sector and its public support is now being questioned.

At the same time, agricultural diversification suffers from the lack of processing infrastructure and services, even though they constitute the main opportunity for economic diversification in the region. This prevents the creation of added value in the region while also limiting possible levers for development financing.

Another point of attention is the lack of attractiveness of current agricultural systems. One of the priorities for the future is to make agriculture more attractive for the young generation, whilst aiming at creating additional jobs in agriculture. In the past, agricultural modernization has often increased labor productivity, which resulted in an exit of workers from agriculture to other sectors. The sustainable development of Sikasso hence requires inventing an attractive, but also labor-intensive and inclusive agriculture.

One option is conventional modernization based on the development of mechanization and the use of the latest technologies, which requires more carbon-based inputs to increase productivity. As a second option, agroecological solutions, organic farming and the development of ecological value chains, are emerging and offer interesting perspectives for sustainable development. The study suggests that agricultural policies need to be formulated in coherence with other regional economic and social dynamics (including security, employment, agribusinesses, gold economy).

The untapped potential of new technologies

In all sectors, new digital technologies are evidently not utilized. Technological solutions to address some of the development challenges in the region exist. They partly compensate the lack of public funding by offering less expensive solutions. Further improvements in communication can enhance connectivity to rural markets and strengthen education and health service. Technological innovations should support transparency and accountability of government at various levels, and advance spatial planning as well as management in the agriculture and agri-food sectors. However, potential introduction of new technologies will have to consider regional social and cultural priorities.

Concluding remarks

Territorial development is not the mere responsibility of elected officials and

administration. It is also the responsibility of the local people, individually and collectively. The specific approach of a territorial foresight as described here offers the opportunity for all to engage in transforming their living environment whilst shaping a future through a better understanding of the present. In this process, multilateral and bilateral cooperation, as well as

national and local NGOs, can play a significant role by contributing to promote stronger, future-proof approaches in joint action with regional and local partners and communities. They may well draw from such approaches to adopt a more systemic vision of development, and thus help to overcome planning in sectoral silos. This will be necessary to fully mobilize the levers of territorial transformation.

