



The experience of the High Authority for Peace in Niger (HACP) and their approach to environmental peacemaking

A holistic approach to peace and the specific case of the Banibangou Agreement of 23 January 2023 (Tillabéri Region, Niger)

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Practice note

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THE GOVERNMENT
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Unité - Travail - Progrès

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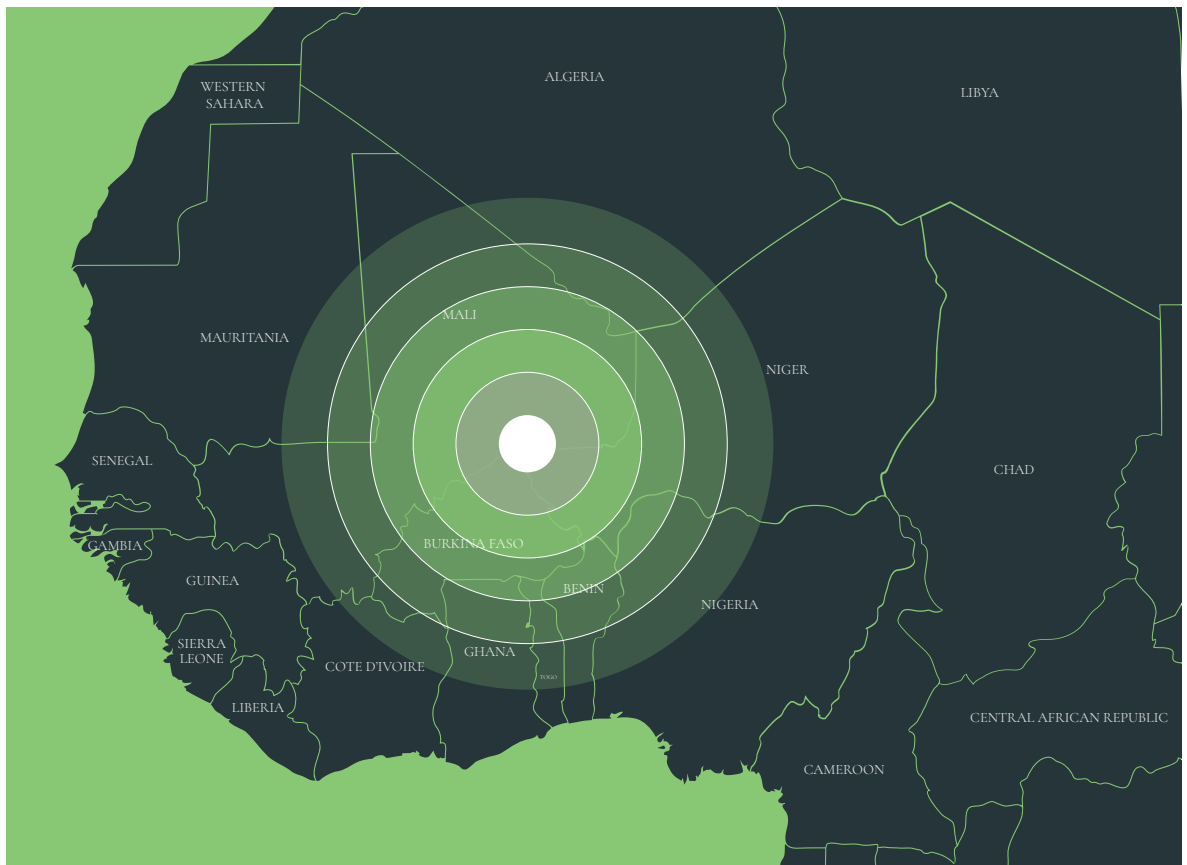
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About the Liptako Gourma region

The Liptako Gourma border region straddles Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and spans an area of around 370,000 km². Nearly 80 per cent of the region's population lives in rural areas, and livestock farming is a key component of the area's rural economy, both in terms of economic weight and as a factor in structuring rural areas. What makes the Liptako Gourma region particularly interesting is the fact that it is made up of some of the most abandoned and deprived areas in the three countries, despite the area's agropastoral,

fishing, wildlife and mining potential.

This is due to a complex crisis that includes climate variability, fierce competition for scarce resources, poverty and demographic pressure, compounded by poor governance and political unrest. All of these factors contribute to increasing levels of violence which has since 2015, spread throughout the Liptako Gourma region.



About the TWG-EIP project

The stability and resilience of regions such as Liptako Gourma are seriously threatened by the combined effects of violence, poor governance and environmental vulnerabilities. Yet peace efforts rarely incorporate a deep understanding of the environmental factors that underpin conflict or peace. With the support of the Directorate of Defence of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the European Institute of Peace and TrustWorks Global have implemented the project “Tackling the Root Causes of Conflict: Environmental Peacemaking in Liptako Gourma”.

This project supports existing efforts to better manage and resolve conflicts in the Liptako Gourma region by applying an environmental approach to peace. Rather than setting up yet another peace initiative, it supports existing local, national, regional and international mediation and stabilisation actors, by contributing a particular angle of natural resource management that can enable peace processes to better address the root causes of conflict and deliver concrete peace dividends that promote the sustainability of agreements.

As part of the project, this practice note was prepared by Assoumane Abdourhamane, Technical Advisor to the HACP and Knight of the Order of Merit of Niger, with the support of the TWG-EIP project team: Arthur Boutellis, Oli Brown, Boubacar Ba, Albert Martinez and Amy Dallas. It is also informed by the workshop held in Niamey from 2 to 4 May 2023.



About the High Authority for Peace in Niger (HACP)

The HACP is an institution attached to the Office of the President of the Republic of Niger. Its mission is to cultivate a spirit of peace and ongoing dialogue between the country's different communities and to foster mutual trust, tolerance and respect as part of a shared desire to live together.

Although initially created following the signing on 24 April 1995 in Niamey of the peace agreements that put an end to a Tuareg rebellion, the HACP has since broadened its mandate to include conflict prevention, peacebuilding and tackling the root causes of insecurity in all of the outlying regions of Niger.

The peace agreements were based on three pillars:

- 1 The first area of positive discrimination saw the integration of former combatants into the Defence and Security Forces (FDS), as well as nationals from conflict zones into the General Administration
- 2 The second pillar of the Agreements concerned institutional reform, with decentralisation offering the regions and communes opportunities for economic and social management
- 3 The third pillar of the Agreements provided for accelerated development of the areas affected by the conflict.

The institution supported the representation of Tuareg leaders and the disarmament and reintegration of former rebels.

1. Introduction: a holistic approach to peace

The HACP's work is part of a "holistic approach that also tackles the underlying causes of terrorism; not only poverty, but also the feelings of exclusion and injustice prevalent in some of our communities that history has placed on the outskirts of our states", and which aims to prevent the instrumentalisation of inter-community conflicts by armed jihadist groups.

This strategy or "holistic approach", which is unique in the Liptako-Gourma region, has a military component, a security, administrative and judicial component, a political dialogue component and an economic component. Firstly, it combines the military response (Niger Armed Forces) and the response of the internal security forces (National Gendarmerie, National Guard and the Police) under the authority or employment of the Ministries of the Interior and Justice, which are responsible for protecting the population and, in particular, preventing their impoverishment through the forced payment of Zakat¹ and the theft of livestock.

The HACP is working with these ministries and local authorities to develop support programmes for the Departmental Security Councils (CDS), which began in the Tillabéri region and have since been extended to other departments. Once a month, meetings of the CDS are organised with the participation of elected representatives (mayors) and customary authorities, and funding is mobilised to implement the recommendations adopted at these meetings.

The HACP then plays a key role in the implementation of political dialogue, between and within the communities in the targeted areas, but also between the communities, the local authorities and the State. Through this unique approach to dialogue, the State of Niger, via the HACP, is seeking to "take the pulse of the communities, learn about their problems, concerns and demands", in particular by organising forums, community meetings, peace caravans, citizens' forums and public hearings throughout the country.

These meetings have sometimes been facilitated by NGOs, but where possible they have been run by the prefectural authorities in order to reinforce the credibility and legitimacy of the State in the eyes of the people. The aim is to prevent certain populations from turning to armed jihadist groups to defend them, or from taking up arms themselves. To this end, an inter-community agreement between all the communities of Zarmaganda was signed in Banibangou under the aegis of the State (see section 3.2 below).

The HACP is also working to provide an economic response in support of populations affected by the conflicts, through emergency humanitarian actions, but also by implementing quick-impact projects such as income-generating or labour-intensive activities, to recreate economic opportunities for young people and other vulnerable sections of the population, and finally by improving targeted populations' access to basic social services (Strategic axes 2 and 3 of the National Strategy for Security and Development)

¹ Zakat is an annual alms tax or poor rate that each Muslim is expected to pay as a religious duty and that is used for charitable and religious purposes.



2.

Context: the challenges of shared natural resources and the role of “peace infrastructures”

This holistic approach to peace has been put to the test in the north of the Tillabéri region, which is an essentially pastoral conflict zone where several communities with different socio-economic and cultural profiles live side by side. The historically structural sources of conflict between pastoral and agropastoral communities have a cross-border and sub-regional dimension, with Mali to the north and Burkina Faso to the west. In addition to this sociological dimension, also linked to the cohabitation of different lifestyles, there are economic and political dimensions related to the existence and control of natural and economic resources.

The exploitation of natural resources shared by social groups with different economic and cultural models naturally leads to divergent interests, which are a potential source of recurring conflict. The area's economic vulnerability, combined with weak governance and exacerbated by recurring food and pastoral crises linked to conflicts and the consequences of climate change - the most common effects of which are exodus, migration, begging and conversion to small-scale trades - explains the widespread lack of sustainable prospects for livelihoods.

Pauperisation particularly affects young people who have little to no schooling and who have difficulty finding their place in the traditional production system, which has been weakened by recurring crises. The marginalisation of young people further reduces their ability to develop alternative models when the traditional system of support and organisation is losing ground. Furthermore, the other models (religious or political) available to young people do not necessarily correspond to a societal model that cultivates peace.

What's more, the deteriorating security situation and the weak presence or absence of legally recognised authority on the other side of the Niger border in Mali and Burkina Faso are straining the capacities of local administrative authorities, who are not always able to provide sufficient and effective solutions for displaced communities and populations.

Consequently, any action aimed at building and consolidating peace must take account of structural challenges such as marginalisation, political, social and economic exclusion, particularly of young people, weak governance and underdevelopment, and work to implement participatory, inclusive and equitable policies for sustainable development and economic recovery. Supporting communities in building the foundations of peaceful coexistence based on concerted management of natural resources and inclusive dialogue is therefore essential to establishing lasting peace.

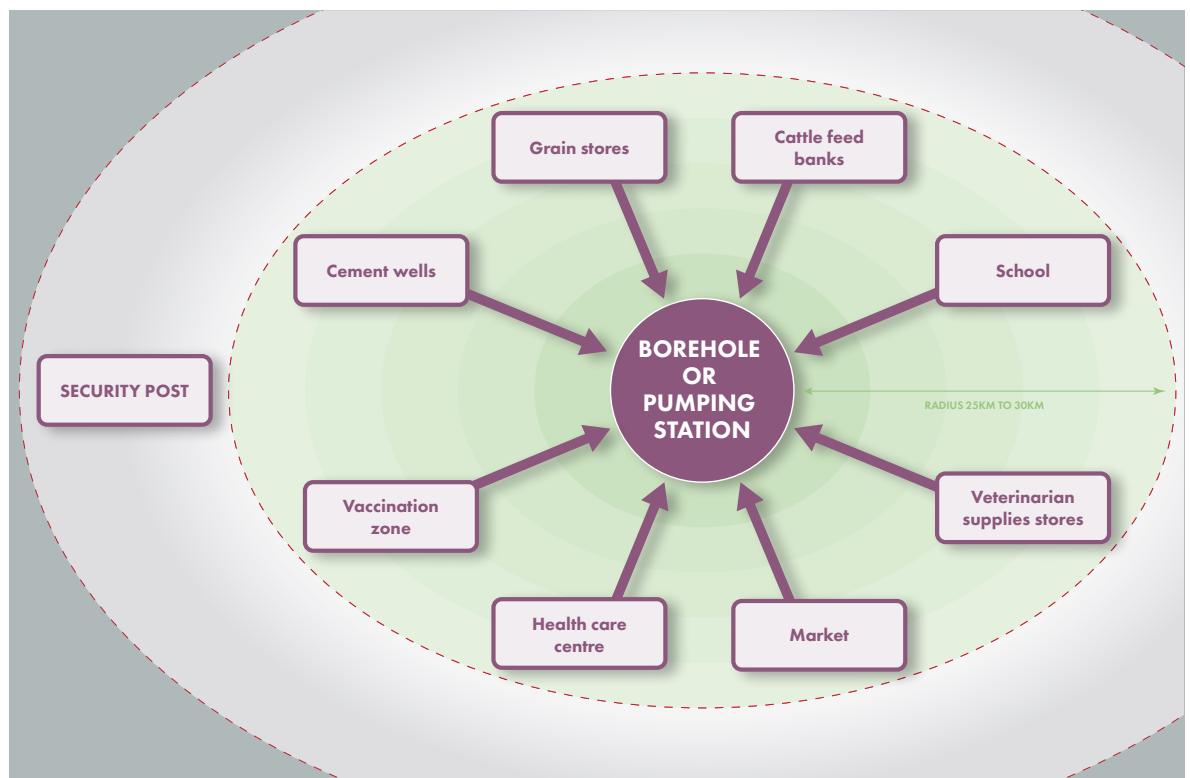
In Niger, public land-use planning policies have favoured sedentary areas due to high population densities. Regulations set the number of people required in an area to build social infrastructure. These regulations put sparsely populated nomadic areas at a disadvantage. The HACP is therefore working to correct inequalities in access to basic social services to prevent tensions and community grievances arising from these inequalities. In these fragile situations, the construction of infrastructure is based on the principle of positive discrimination.

In 2015, the HACP, as the State institution responsible for overseeing all peacebuilding activities, began building “peace infrastructures”, a series of projects in nomadic and/or at-risk areas designed as magnets for the creation of shared economic opportunities aimed at strengthening concerted resource management and dialogue. They may be designed to limit the passage of people from one country to another, to settle populations on national territory along a border, or to help herders and farmers respect the pastoral enclaves defined by the rural code.

These infrastructures are not just designed to combat inequalities. Their implementation helps to strengthen security by creating living and economic development areas where basic services are available. They can also be a powerful force for social cohesion when they are the result of agreements negotiated between communities, consolidating them and supporting their implementation.

The choice of the locality where the infrastructure is built is the result of “social agreements” negotiated over several months in the various communities involved.

Peace infrastructures consist of building or rehabilitating and supplying community infrastructures, including boreholes (a local saying goes “Aman Iman” or “water is life”) to support pastoral production along the Niger-Malian border, limit herd movements and protect agricultural areas. In addition to water infrastructure, other services such as grain banks, cattle feed banks, vaccination pens, animal slaughter areas, health huts, schools, security posts and income-generating activities targeting women and young people are also envisaged (see figure below). This will enhance the value of pastoral areas, encouraging pastoral communities to stay longer in their homelands and live peacefully with the other social groups who also benefit from the interventions.



The concept of peace infrastructures ▲

3.

HACP initiatives demonstrating the holistic approach

3.1 Social agreements

In certain regions, particularly in Tillabéri, which faces urgent challenges and where the risk of violence is high due to clashes in neighbouring Mali and the resulting displacement of people and livestock, the HACP sometimes also facilitates local dialogue processes which can lead to the signing of “social agreements”. These are contractual documents sanctioning an agreement between communities benefiting from and/or sharing pastoral resources and/or pastoral developments.

These “social agreements” make it possible, *inter alia*, to secure land tenure and improve joint management of the “peace infrastructures” described in the previous section. Local communities, as holders of priority use rights on the sites, must give their agreement to the installation of infrastructure (boreholes, schools, healthcare centres, livestock feed banks, markets, etc.) and decide on the method of management and access to this infrastructure.

Social agreements are based on a consensus-building process between local authorities, technical services and community representatives. As part of its political support for the “Nord Tillabéri/PNT” and “Redressement Tillabéri” stabilisation projects that it is implementing in this high-risk area, the HACP has facilitated social agreements for a large number of structuring infrastructures. For example, in the north Tillabéri pastoral zone in the Tondikiwindi commune, herders used to spend eight months of the year in Mali because there were no watering points for their animals on Niger territory, exposing the young people in these communities to recruitment by armed groups present in these areas.

The representatives of the herding and farming communities are accustomed to arranging meetings among themselves to resolve the various day-to-day issues they encounter. These populations are aware of

their mutual economic interdependence. Despite the regulatory framework provided by the rural code and the existence of consultation forums, many situations remain unresolved.

Local people turn to their traditional representatives, who are the holders of the territory’s history, and who in turn present problems that go beyond their remit to the mayor, who is responsible for implementing the commune’s development plan. Mayors and traditional chiefs are on the front line when it comes to hearing the grievances of communities. They play an important role in the social cohesion of their entity. Representatives of landowning families and the diaspora also play an important role in infrastructure projects, which can only be carried out with their agreement. The establishment of Peace Coordination Committees (CCP) in several communes of the Tillabéri region is part of the development dynamic closely linked to the Land Commissions in the region. The role of the PCC is to monitor, provide early warning, and collect and pass on the information needed to help the authorities make the right decisions to consolidate peace, strengthen social tranquillity, and defend and secure the population and their property.

The Departmental Land Commission (COFODEP), which is chaired by the Prefect, is a joint body that brings together the various users, decentralised authorities, government representatives, technical services and community representatives. It is represented in the communes (Communal Land Commission, COFOCOM) and villages (Village Land Commission, COFOB), with the mayor in charge of the commune’s development plan. But even if these structures encourage dialogue between communities, they are sometimes blocked because the solutions envisaged require departures from the regulations.

The HACP's role in negotiating and facilitating "social agreements" has several objectives:

- To ensure that the infrastructure project is in the public interest.
- Conduct high-quality consultation to reach a lasting decision.
- Adapt the approach to the context, the situation and the players involved, by including the relevant stakeholders as negotiations progress.
- Establish a local ownership dynamic from the beginning to the end of the process to bring about concerted decisions and a commitment on the part of local people to the shared management of the infrastructure built and shared resources in question.

The meetings are organised differently depending on whether a shared resource falls within the remit of a single commune (communal forum) or two departments (interdepartmental forum). Users are brought together to discuss the final agreement on the works and the location. During these meetings, administrative officials (prefects, mayors), departmental technical services (DDE, DDH, DDGR, COFODEP, etc.) and traditional authorities present the elements of the agreement relating to the work to be carried out. Discussions will also focus on the principles of access and management, which must be transparent, fair and include all users. These discussions will make it possible to establish the basis of a social consensus around the operation and management of a borehole/well, for example.

The social agreement document then has to be translated into local languages and explained at meetings that require HACP teams to travel to the villages. The signing of the document is sanctioned by a celebration which, beyond its festive dimension, has a symbolic significance that must be taken into account. It sometimes gives rise to important exchanges that strengthen the social life of the communities. The aim is to put an end to the disagreements that have arisen during the negotiation process. For example, when a "social agreement" was signed that had led to a deadlock, the parties involved apologised to each other for the differences that had arisen during the discussions and the errors of assessment they had made.

3.2 Banibangou agreement of 23rd January 2023



The Banibangou agreement of 23 January 2023 is one of the most significant agreements signed in Niger in recent years. The hope is that this agreement will put an end to a conflict that has lasted for two decades, resulting in hundreds of deaths, thousands of displaced persons and disruption of agro-pastoral activity in the Tillabéri region. The deterioration in the security situation from 2019-2020 onwards, with attacks against the Nigerien army but also targeting civilians, led to fears at the time that the conflict would evolve into inter-community violence.

Sedentary Zarma communities have begun to set up self-defence groups and arm themselves to compensate for the absence of the state, while nomadic Fulani communities have often had to leave the area because of the threats and stigmatisation they have suffered. Banibangou was seen as a dike that could not be breached under the pressure of increasing clashes between armed groups on the Malian side of the border, and the increase in attacks by armed groups had led the prefect to issue a decree creating a "land has an owner" vigilance committee and to recruit young people to defend some 30 villages, while other young people were being indoctrinated by armed groups.

The eight-page agreement, negotiated by the HACP over almost two years, including nine months of intensive negotiations with the support of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), aims to reduce tensions fuelled by competition for natural resources, particularly land and pastoral resources, and armed violence in the Tillabéri region. Relatives weighed in on the agreement, including those who had livestock in Mali, as well as community and religious leaders. Meetings were held initially in neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso, then in the field and Niamey and the agreement was then publicised in the field and among the diaspora even before it was officially signed.

The agreement was signed on 23 January 2023 at a forum that brought together representatives of the Zarma, Peul, Tuareg, Arab and Hausa communities, with a view to peaceful coexistence, in the presence of key witnesses including religious leaders, village chiefs, the coordinator of the self-defence groups, the regional administration and the Minister of the Interior, who had initiated the forum. Shortly after the signing, many livestock farmers arrived in the commune with their livestock - some of whom had not come for ten years - taking advantage of the new-found calm and the rich pastures that had been left fallow. This created demographic pressure on the commune, which had to be managed in terms of pastureland and water, as many boreholes had been sabotaged in the meantime.

A monitoring committee made up of 23 representatives of the various communities, which reports to the HACP and the Ministry of the Interior, has been set up and meets quarterly. The agreement makes recommendations to the government of Niger in terms of restoring basic services, providing communities with water points, and engaging in dialogue with armed groups to find a lasting solution to the security crisis in the Tillabéri region while promoting traditional and religious conflict management mechanisms.

Support from the state and its partners will now be key to ensuring local peace dividends, as well as the eventual effective disarmament of the self-defence groups. The government has already made emergency humanitarian funds available during Ramadan 2023 to facilitate the cantonment of these self-defence groups, particularly until some combatants are integrated into the National Guard, while others will simply be demobilised.

Transhumance and livestock movements (while violence continues on the Malian side of the border) are also a challenge in terms of shared management of water, pasture and land. The list below in section 3.3 of specific needs to support the implementation of the agreement has been prepared by the commune and the HACP remains mobilised to support implementation due to the communes' lack of resources to set up their own management and monitoring committees for the time being.

Despite the challenges, the conclusion of the Banibangou agreement on 23 January 2023 helped to create a positive dynamic for dialogue between the communities and with the State of Niger. This led to the conclusion of a similar agreement in Ouallam, in the same Tillabéri region, in June 2023, and other similar dialogues being envisaged, notably in Abala. Although political developments in Niamey during the summer of 2023 raise questions about the future of the Malian government's overall approach, the Banibangou and Ouallam agreements appear to be holding up for the time being.

2 https://hdcentre.org/insights/accord-de-paix-de-banibangou_niger/

3.3 An example of requirements put forward by the Banibangou department

SECURITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reinforcement of the operational capacities of the National Guard Squadron and the Gendarmerie Brigade in terms of human resources and equipment• Creation of a special squadron of demobilised self-defence group members based in Dinara
ROADS AND ACCESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Construction of the Banibangou-Darey Dey-Abala road• Rehabilitation of the Ouallam-Banibangou road
EDUCATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creation of a girls' boarding school in Banibangou• Creation of two general education schools in Garbey and Tilloa• Rehabilitation of all classrooms destroyed as a result of attacks by armed groups
HEALTH
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Construction of the Banibangou health district• Renovation of integrated health centres in Gosso, Tilloa and Tizégorou
HYDRAULICS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Renovation of pastoral pumping stations in Boudjé Dey, Diney Dey, Bissaou Peulh, Taffouguey, Intédéné, Baga and Korey Gorou• Renovation of wells at Boudjé Dey, Baney Kokorbé, Gouno Kaira, Balla Gouno Kaira, Salkadamna, Fonney Ganad, N'Kourgorou, Tillabatt, Kallé Dey, Bissaou, N'Toussane, Taffouguey, Intédéné, Weidabangou, Baga
AGRICULTURE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Development of the Banibangou and Soumatt Tilloa market garden sites• Assignment of an agricultural officer to Tilloa
LIVESTOCK
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Construction of livestock markets at Sinégodar and Tizégorou• Creation of animal passageways• Creation of grazing areas
ENVIRONMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restoration and seeding of land• Reforestation of areas• Treatment of catchment areas
GOOD GOVERNANCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Return of administrative staff to their posts• Return of public services



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