



SONIA LE BAY
MOUSSOULIMOUNE Y. MAÏGA
OSÉ TIÉNOU

MALI

**Assessment of local government
performance: experiences with a self-
evaluation tool**



AIDE DE L'EGLISE NORVEGIENNE



Deutscher
Entwicklungsdienst

MALI: Assessment of local government performance: experiences with a self-evaluation tool/Sonia Le Bay; Moussoulimoune Y. Maïga; Osé Tiénou
Bamako: Communiquances, 2007-28p.
Registration of copyright: october 2007
ISBN 99952-58-04-8

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FOREWORD

Sonia Le Bay (SNV-Mali)

Christiane Loquai (ECDPM)

According to a Bambara adage, 'He who knows all will not die'. Today, is an evident desire, in many countries of the West African region which have launched decentralisation reforms since the 1990s, to try out new approaches and new methods of cooperation to build local monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity!¹. By sharing with the readers some of the experiences and lessons learned from these new M&E approaches, this publication aims to make a modest contribution to the knowledge available on the subject.

This publication is for all actors in development, working in the field of decentralisation and local governance, especially practitioners and policymakers working on issues connected with capacity building in the area of monitoring, evaluation and democratic control of local governance structures.

The case study presented in this document has been prepared in the context of an exercise that aimed to document, analyse and learn from experiences with different approaches/methods and instruments for building the capacities of different actors in decentralisation and local governance, and in particular, the capacities of local government to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of these complex reform processes.

This learning exercise started in Mali. It has been a joint initiative by the *Réseau de Réflexion et d'Échanges sur le Développement Local* (REDL², a Malian network of development organisations and programmes working in the field of decentralisation and local development), the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV-Mali), the Malian Ministry of Territorial Administration and Local Government (MATCL) and the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), an independent foundation based in Maastricht in the Netherlands, in cooperation with several development organisations working in West Africa.

The purpose of this exercise has been to jointly map and document relevant experiences in the West African region and share 'good practice' and lessons learned. A total of 11 case studies from different countries of the West African region were prepared during this exercise, and a seminar held under the auspices of the MATCL in Bamako on 17 and 18 May 2006 provided a forum for a structured exchange of experiences.

This study '**Assessment of local government performance: experiences with a self-evaluation tool**' has been prepared by Sonia Le Bay, in collaboration with Moussoulimoune Y. Maïga and Osé Tiénou.

Sonia Le Bay, a tropical geographer by training, is an advisor on local governance, planning, monitoring and evaluation at the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) in Mali. During the twenty-odd years she has been working in West Africa, she has helped to design several

1- Taken from the welcome speech given by Mr. Ibrahima Sylla, decentralisation advisor at the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Local Government (MATCL) of Mali, at the sub-regional seminar 'Building capacities for monitoring and evaluation of decentralisation and local governance in West Africa: exchange of experience and learning'.

2- For more details see <http://www.snmali.org/actus/redlinfo0606.pdf>. The REDL members taking part in this learning exercise were SNV-Mali; the Programme d'Appui aux Collectivités Territoriales (PACT), a project in support of local government run by German Technical Cooperation (GTZ); l'Aide de l'Église Norvégienne (AEN), Norwegian Church Aid; CARE International in Mali; the Programme d'Appui aux Acteurs de la Décentralisation (PAAD), a development programme of HELVETAS-Mali; the Swiss Association for International Cooperation: 'Solidarité, Union, Coopération' (SUCO), a Canadian NGO; the Association of French Volunteers (AFVP); and the Programme Gouvernance Partagée (PGP), a programme financed by the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

participatory monitoring and evaluation systems and to implement development programmes under bilateral cooperation arrangements and for international non-governmental organisations such as the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), CARE International, etc.

Moussoulimoune Y. Maïga is an economist and advisor to the Support Programme for the Actors of Decentralisation (PAAD) of the Swiss Association for International Cooperation (Helvetas) in Mali. He is responsible for capacity building among the elected officers and staff of municipalities. Previously, he occupied various senior posts in the area of adult training at GTZ and the Centre for Audiovisual Production Services (CESPA).

Osé Tiénou is an economist and has been working in local development for fifteen years in Mali. He runs a municipal advisory centre that provides advice and support for local governments. Previously, he was head of the monitoring and evaluation division of GTZ's project, 'Promotion of Local Initiatives (PRODILO)', and has worked as a consultant for a number of organisations (the Micro-Development Programme of the Canadian International Development Agency and Plan International).

In this study, the authors (who have also played their part in designing, testing and promoting the use of a performance self-evaluation tool) describe the various stages involved in developing this tool. In a context of municipal ownership, and drawing on the publication of the tool and the proposed approach (MATCL/DNCT-SNV-HELVETAS-PACT/GTZ, 2004), they highlight the important role that mentoring plays in self-evaluation exercises and the potential pitfalls that users might encounter. They also examine the problems that the various stakeholders may come up against if they focus solely on performance-based results and disregard the wealth of communication before and after the exercises, which may well pave the way for shared responsibility and consensual decisions.

They show that a key factor in the success of a process of this kind, developed with and for local government in Mali, has been the ongoing strategic alliances that have been forged between the Ministry for Territorial Administration and Local Government (MATCL) and various development organisations working with municipalities.

The authors caution all those keen to develop this kind of tool that the path from design to large-scale use may be a long one fraught with problems. If an approach is to be participatory and draw on the support of a wide range of actors, the interests and opinions of the stakeholders (municipalities, civil society, the State, development partners, etc.), differing in some cases and often changeable, have to be carefully managed over the long term.

At the same time, efforts to devise similar tools in neighbouring countries, encouraged by the publication of the tool tested in Mali, show that these approaches have considerable potential for replication. This is especially so because their aim is, in particular, to make it possible to pinpoint the effects of capacity building through the improved performance of local government.

The facilitators of this joint documentation, analysis and learning exercise would like to thank the authors, the members of the Malian REDL network and the organisations working in other West African countries that have supported and co-financed the preparation of the different case studies. Through the generous support of these organisations and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) these case studies are being published in both French and English and will also be included in a more comprehensive publication, bringing together all the case studies and the results of the regional seminar held in May 2006.

They would also like to express their gratitude to Mr. Ibrahima Sylla, decentralisation advisor at the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Local Government of Mali, for his indefatigable support for the success of this joint initiative. Last but not least, they would like to thank Kathleen Sheridan for her language editing work and David Harris for translating this document to English.

INTRODUCTION

Local government performance: everyone's business, but who is responsible?

For us, as elected officers, and for municipal staff in general, decentralisation and our mandate has meant that we spend our entire time in training. We have hardly any time to spend on municipal business...

(Statement by a mayor from the 'Cercle' of Banamba, Koulikoro region - Mali, 2001)

In the late 1990s, the Malian government devised a *National Programme in Support of Local Government (Programme national d'appui aux collectivités territoriales)* with the assistance of donors and development organisations (TFPs). At that time, decentralisation had just taken shape in the form of 703 municipalities, 49 'cercles', 8 regions and 1 district (Bamako). Ninety-seven percent of the municipalities had just been set up and a whole new generation of elected councillors were starting to learn their trade.

The aim of this national programme was to meet the challenges likely to shape the success or failure of decentralisation and, in particular, to build the capacity of municipalities to take on and perform their tasks. This included looking at the role of elected municipal councillors as prime movers of decentralisation, their capacity to rally the various actors in municipalities around local development and to ensure that devolution of competencies and resources to municipalities would take place.

The technical component of this programme, which has since been implemented, revolves around the support and training provided by the centres de conseil communal (CCCs) (municipal advisory centres) and private service providers. It also relies on the decentralised State services (*services déconcentrés*), which are to assist the municipalities and provide information to them³.

The National Programme in Support of Local Government is intended to be temporary. It is expected to build municipal capacity, chiefly in municipal administration and management, local planning, and ownership. For this purpose, the municipalities draw up a support plan stating their specific needs of assistance.

In 2001, the Direction Nationale des Collectivités Territoriales (DNCT - National Local Government Directorate) along with some development organisations were keen to find a way to track the outcome of capacity building with elected municipal councillors and municipal staff. Moreover, they were interested to see how the municipalities in different environments were functioning and facing the challenges of development. At the same time, the municipalities were anxious to be operational and to be able to meet the different expectations of citizens, the supervisory authority⁴ and the development organisations.

This led various actors involved in the decentralisation process to pool their experience and skills. They designed a participatory and educational approach to performance self-assessment, which could provide answers to their concerns.

3- These public service providers represent and implement the policy of the central government at the sub-national level. They are managed by their respective ministry.

4- Over and above their specific duties, governors, 'préfets', 'sous-préfets' and tax collectors ensure that laws, regulations, decisions and guidelines from central government are enforced.

While this seemed to be attempting the impossible, it was a worthwhile challenge to undertake.

It was this challenge that finally led to the publication of the 'Local Government Performance Self-Evaluation Tool' in April 2004 (see Figure 1). In the following chapters, we would like to share our experience with designing, testing and replicating this tool with the various actors, in Africa and elsewhere, who are thinking about or taking steps to build local capacity to monitor and evaluate decentralisation and local governance.

If you can't stand smoke, you won't get any charcoal.

(Peul proverb)⁵

Figure 1: Title page of the guide on the local government performance self-evaluation tool



1. METHODOLOGY FOR STOCK-TAKING AND ANALYSIS OF THE PROCESS

During such a wide-ranging and complex multi-actor experiment, taking place over several years, documentation often builds up informally. Documents (such as personal notes, mission reports, minutes of meetings and workshops, information on instruments having similar objectives, summaries of questionnaires carried out during the test phase, comments gathered on preliminary documents, photographs, etc.) are filed away and often forgotten. This case study offers an excellent opportunity to draw on this documentation and to look at certain issues in more detail. It is then possible to:

- reconstruct the main stages of the process;
- put the initial objectives and those actually achieved into perspective, while attempting to take the points of view of the various stakeholders into account (bearing in mind that, in practice, users' initiatives may well improve the approach over time);
- compare the options chosen with the results actually obtained;
- go beyond the lessons learned, to find out what challenges still exist, what avenues remain to be explored and what strategies can be used to meet these challenges, along with the potential alliances that could help mobilise additional actors.

For this study, a guideline⁶ was distributed to a number of volunteers, who had been involved in designing and testing the self-evaluation tool, in order to help them to jointly take stock, analyse and document their experiences with the authors of this study. Their contributions were collated by one volunteer acting as a focal point. This main author was also responsible for drawing up an initial version of the information and analysis. This was then sent to the initial contributors and to three resource persons. Two of these resource persons had taken part in the design and use of the tool. The third was more 'external'; she was a recent user of the results obtained by local governments for the creation of a geographical information system (GIS)⁷. Taking into account the comments received, the person acting as a focal point then drew up a second version for discussion at a sub-regional seminar⁸. This version was then fleshed out with information from exchanges in the plenary sessions and workshops and from the informal discussions between delegates from various backgrounds in six West African countries.⁹

5- The proverbs were collected by Sonia Le Bay.

6- See C. Loquai and S. Le Bay (2005).

7- The GIS experiment was presented at the sub-regional seminar 'Building capacities for monitoring and evaluation of decentralisation and local governance in West Africa: exchange of experience and learning; Bamako 17-18 May 2006. See Foranim Consult (2006). It was also used in the case study 'Mali, Geographical information systems for the development of rural municipalities'.

8- See preceding footnote.

9- This relates in particular to the examples of replication in other countries: Niger, Benin and Burkina Faso. See chapter 5 and Foranim Consult (2006).

It was mainly the staff of donor agencies and development organisations, who had worked on the approach as a whole, who was involved in the drafting stage, but it was possible to obtain a direct contribution from the various stakeholders by taking account of the following:

- the information provided by user municipalities at the time of the self-evaluation exercises (late 2005 and during 2006) and the discussions of various ways of improving the strategy that had taken place with them;
- discussions that took place throughout 2005 and 2006 with the Direction Nationale des Collectivités

Territoriales (DNCT) and its National coordination unit for technical support for local government (CCN), along with donor agencies and development organisations, particularly the members of the Réseau de Réflexion et d'Échanges sur le Développement Local (REDL).¹⁰

This method of work was chosen as a result of lessons learned in previous exercises of joint stock taking and analysis. If such an exercise is to be truly participatory, it has to be well managed. It is not feasible to involve all those who have participated in the design and testing of the self-evaluation tool or are users.

2. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE SELF-EVALUATION TOOL

To help the various actors to capitalise on this experience and enable readers to better understand the process of conceptualisation, testing and replication and its dynamics, we have drawn up a summary table showing the timeframe for the main stages, the measures taken and the actors involved (see Table 1).

When the process was launched, none of the actors had any real idea of the time that they would have to devote to it. Even now, it is difficult to provide figures for individuals or stakeholder organisations because detailed records have not been kept.

Nobody imagined, however, that almost 30 months would pass between the design stage and the publication stage. Had the actors involved known that this would be the case, it might well have undermined their motivation. In retrospect, a 'critical number' of actors managed to retain enough motivation to overcome the challenges and achieve the objective, perhaps even going beyond it.

The publication is a collective work, drawing on contributions from those directly involved as well as many others who provided support.

¹⁰- See footnote 2.

Table 1: Summary of the process

Phases	Stages	Measures	Actors
DESIGN (08/2001-08/2002)	Pooling of concerns, discussions/proposals, decisions	Definition of roles: - process coordination - facilitation of the process and initiatives - technical contributions to the process - identification of stakeholders	DNCT/CCN SNV DNCT/CCN, SNV, Helvetas, PACT/ PRODILO-GTZ, CCC, REDL
		Definition of basic principles (a tool for local government), stages and a provisional timetable	idem
		Dissemination of the outline document: guide to the use of the tool for evaluating municipal performance	SNV with Helvetas, PACT/PRODILO-GTZ, CCC, REDL, DNCT/CCN
		Review of existing information: documentary search/forging of contacts	Same actors with other TFPs/CCC operators
DESIGN (08/2001-08/2002)	Devising the tool and its method of use	- Outline proposals/thematic discussions, comments, adoption - Proposals for the content of the tool (indicators) and its methods/discussions, comments, adoption - Drafting of a provisional version of the tool (04/2002) and an outline of the methods for testing it	DNCT/CCN, SNV, Helvetas, PACT/GTZ, representatives CCC idem SNV
		- Collection of comments at a workshop on the provisional version (05/2002) - Meetings with potential users (explanations, discussions, comments) - Feedback workshop (07/2002)	DNCT/CCN, SNV, Helvetas, PACT/GTZ with REDL, CCC, PTF, AMM, resource persons CCC with the CLO and municipalities
		- Finalisation of the tool and the methods for testing it (08/2002)	DNCT/CCN, SNV, Helvetas, PACT/GTZ, CCC, REDL SNV
TEST (09-12/2002)	Testing of the self-evaluation tool for local government performance (list of indicators + methods)	- Drafting of the terms of reference for the test + standardised tools (grid for verifying the relevance of the indicators and feasibility of the tool + summary sheet of the test results + proposed outline for drafting of the report) 09/2002 - Testing on a representative sample of municipalities: urban/suburban/rural, different sizes and geographical areas (09-11/2002)	SNV, CCN for CCC (SNV, Helvetas, PACT/GTZ advisors) CCC with 3% of municipalities (elected officers, municipal staff, population, civil society and supervisory authority)
	Workshop to pool the test results	- Drafting of terms of reference for moderation of the workshop and proposed programme (10/2002) - Workshop to pool the test results (11/2002): discussion of the general summary of results provided by the CCCs, proposals to improve the tool and its methods, validation of the results - Further development of the process and allocation of tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● coordination ● drafting ● comments 	SNV, DNCT/CCN with 'Foranim-Consult' DNCT/CCN, SNV, Helvetas, PACT/GTZ, CCC, REDL, 'Foranim-Consult' DNCT/CCN DNCT/CCN, SNV DNCT/CCN, SNV, Helvetas, PACT/GTZ

Phases	Stages	Measures	Actors
FINALISATION 2003	Drafting of the final version of the tool and its methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draft version - Final comments - Drafting the final version - Validation of the final version - Drafting the preface 	SNV/CCN CCN/SNV, DNCT, Helvetas, PACT/GTZ SNV/CCN MATCL/DNCT MATCL
PUBLICATION 01-04/2004	Selection of service provider and printing of the document	Call for tenders (01/2004): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - selection procedures and criteria for providers (technical publishing specifications, number of copies to be printed/document distribution key, work to be performed, submission of bids, roles and responsibilities of actors, work schedule, etc.) and creation of a selection panel - financial package - technical follow-up 	DNCT/CCN with SNV, Helvetas, PACT/GTZ SNV, Helvetas/DDC, PACT/GTZ SNV, DNCT with 'Communicances'
DISTRIBUTION 07-12/2004	Distribution of the document to users,potential mentors and other interested parties	7000 copies distributed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - direct users (60%) - potential mentor organisations offering counselling and support (20%) including 20% as stock to meet emerging needs in Mali and the sub-region 	DNCT/CCN with SNV, Helvetas, PACT/GTZ
USE 01/2005-to date	Local government self-evaluation exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local governments informed at CLO meetings - Mentoring services proposed - Synergy between technical partners for joint mentoring of local government exercises - Local governments evaluate their own performance (17% had carried out the exercise once by 06/2006) 	Regional monitoring officers of the CCN and CCC CCC advisors, technical partners, service providers For instance: PGP/National NGOs/ SNV/CCC, PGP/National NGOs/ Helvetas, CCC Network, etc. Elected officers, municipal staff, local populace, civil society and supervisory authority
REPLICATION 01/2005-to date	Take-over/adaptation of the local government performance self-evaluation tool:some examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mali: 2004 plan to monitor the effects of financial support for local governments and to index their drawing rights (58% of indicators taken from the tool) - Mali: since 2005, during 'municipal diagnostics', leading to capacity building action plans, 90% of the questions asked taken from the tool (in 36% of local authorities) - Niger (a): 2005, adaptation of the tool to include the MDGs (b) - Benin: underway, adaptation of the tool to include the MDGs (b) - Burkina Faso: in development (b) - Mali: 2006, national municipal competition with fields and indicators taken from the tool (64% of indicators used) 	TFPs 'Decentralisation' Group, DNCT By national NGOs, partners of the PGP Planning Ministry, SNV ANCB, Helvetas, GTZ, SNV, PNUD MATD, GTZ MATCL/DNCT

Source: Le Bay, S.(a). Experience shared at the 'sub-regional seminar',Bamako, 17-18/05/06. (b). Millennium Development Goals.

2.1. Working towards a common goal on monitoring and evaluation

In early 2001, organisations that were involved in implementing decentralisation and which regularly pooled their experience, in the REDL Network¹¹ and with the DNCT quickly became aware that they were focusing on the same problem: ways of measuring the effects over time of building the capacity of local government. The DNCT was also trying to gauge these effects so that the strategies being implemented nationally could be fine-tuned.

As a result, the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), Swiss Association for International Cooperation (Helvetas) and German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) decided to share their results. They pooled their efforts and resources, and made the experience of their various advisors, working groups, programmes¹² and CCCs throughout Mali available to the DNCT. The DNCT was already engaged in various time-consuming matters, which took up a great deal of its human and financial resources. This support meant in principle that it could make better progress preparing a consensual and functioning approach.

This set-up itself entailed some challenges, especially with regard to the ability of the various partners to do the following:

- to find a shared, harmonious and efficient way of working;
- to draw up a time schedule for common actions and to follow it without holding up other commitments elsewhere;
- to mobilise the necessary resources (human, financial¹³ and physical) in a timely, flexible and concerted way;
- to share a common vision of the choices to be made, including the approach, the methods, options to meet the targeted objectives, etc.;
- to communicate regularly with one another and with other TFPs in order to keep them informed about the process, ask for their contributions, and prepare for the implementation phase of the approach.

In consequence, from the very outset, these organisations had to work out a number of things in a participatory way (see Table 1, design stage), particularly the following:

- role sharing: process coordination by DNCT/CCN; process and initiative facilitation by SNV; technical contributions to the process by DNCT/CCN, SNV, Helvetas, GTZ, CCC, REDL;
- adoption of common basic principles;
- objectives to be achieved;
- stakeholders, cooperation and sources of information available;
- an outline of the various stages of work to be carried out, a draft time schedule and monitoring mechanism, etc.

If you climb a baobab, you'll get more fruit, but if you stay on the ground you'll know when you are going home.

(Bambara proverb)

In retrospect, keeping to the schedule caused the most problems, largely because:

- the people working on the strategy had heavy workloads;
- the work to be carried out was rather 'repetitive': discussions, production of a draft version of documents, calls for comments/discussions, drafting a new version and so on;
- the participatory approach required the organisations involved to work together on a regular basis and to devote considerable amounts of time to cooperating with the other key actors, depending on their availability, etc.

However, over and above these factors, which complicated the process, the managements of the various organisations always gave it priority, and some people worked on it throughout to ensure its successful completion.

Aside from the real need for this tool, two factors undoubtedly played a part:

- Donors and development organisations supporting decentralisation and local governance were keen to draw lessons from previous experiences. There had been considerable individual investment in the design of monitoring and evaluation tools that had

11- Specific objectives of the REDL: a) to share tools, documentation and information on support for implementing decentralisation; b) to help to improve the tools and strategies devised by member organisations, to systematise and to disseminate them; c) to analyse and share opinions on local development problems, concepts, approaches and strategies; d) to share lessons from field experiences with the authorities responsible for implementing decentralisation. See <http://www.snmali.org/actus/redlinfo0606.pdf>

12- For SNV, the programs included the Decentralisation Support Programme in the Koulikoro Region (PDRK), Bamako Urban Development Programme (PDUB), Development Support Programme for the Municipalities of Ménaka (PDCM). For Helvetas, they were the Decentralisation Support Programme (PAD); and for GTZ, the Local Government Support Programme (PACT) and Local Initiative Promotion (PRODILO) project.

13- Everyone took part in the programme during the hours they would normally work for their own organisation, so the specific costs incurred by the activity arose only from the test phase onwards.

ultimately been used for a short time only in their own areas of action (as part of the implementation of a programme or project, for example) and by only a few actors (almost solely by direct partners). The latter often felt that these tools had been proposed/imposed from outside.

■ The DNCT felt that this was an opportunity to make headway in harmonising monitoring and evaluation tools for local governance to make them consistent. They also felt that coordinating a multi-actor process to design an approach (tool and methods) would help to build and consolidate strategic alliances.

Following the years of relatively standardised training, support and advice, it was important for the 'supporters' to offer municipalities an opportunity to examine their performance on a regular basis. This would enable them to identify the specific technical support that they still needed in order to carry out their duties and provide their populace with high-quality services. Analysing their situation would help them to progress to the point where they were not just consumers of services but real partners able to negotiate with the outside world. Following the municipal elections in June 2004, where the renewal rate was 70%, these were increasingly acute questions for the new municipal councils.

2.2. A key actor: the local government and its various components

From the point of view of elected councillors, the CCC advisors responsible for supporting a large number of municipalities could not always readily perceive their particular needs or help them to identify these needs in order to draw up a support plan.

In parallel, a multitude of 'supporters' (lacking any coordination in some cases) were going from municipality to municipality, all offering training of variable quality without any particular concern for real needs. Elected officers were also aware that they did not really know what their needs were - or could not agree on them - because they lacked any tangible reference information. They also admitted that rather than starting from actual observation within their municipality or any problem-solving strategy, they tended to refer to the titles of the training modules they had heard about.

In the space of two years, I have attended, together with other councillors, five training courses on the subject 'what is decentralisation?' In hindsight, I know what I think about the quality of these courses. . . . It is always difficult, however, to talk about this issue with the village chiefs, who do not understand that things have changed. Even among the people, those who have had training do not want to understand because that often suits them.

(Statement in 2001 by a mayor from the 'Cercle' of Bougouni, Sikasso Region, Mali)

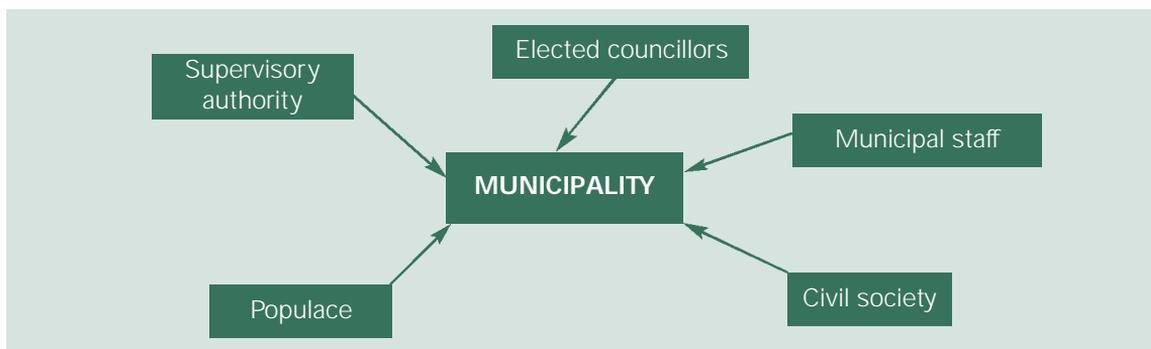
Elected councillors, municipal staff, the populace, the supervisory authority, deconcentrated State services and the CCCs became increasingly aware that the 'training approach' did not provide all the answers. The grievances and malfunctions reported in different municipalities often had different causes. Some were due to a lack of competence or the resolve to carry out certain tasks, others seemed to be the result of poor circulation of information, a lack of exchanges between the actors in decentralisation and the lack of any common vision or shared objectives.¹⁴

Mayors were keen to take up any approach that would help them tackle these problems and put them in a better position for discussions with the populace, the supervisory authority and the 'actors' (donors, projects/programme, NGOs, CCCs, service providers, etc.).

The priority for the DNCT and its partners was to enable elected officers to take the lead within the monitoring and evaluation approach. The aim was to respect the role of mayors as municipal leaders responsible for the development and functioning of their municipalities, while enabling them to 'lead' by working in synergy with other actors (municipal staff, the people, civil society - associations, groups, NGOs, private sector, service providers, etc. - supervisory authorities). The idea was to encourage them to play an active role in analysis. At the same time, the initiative to analyse the performance of their municipality had to come from the mayors, if it was to be credible.

14- This was confirmed in the study conducted by the DNCT/CCN in June 2003 (see Annex II).

Figure 2: Groups of actors at the municipal level



2.3. The option: self-evaluation

There were very few ways in which responsibility for a planned strategy on the part of local government in both urban and rural areas could be reconciled with the many objectives targeted by the various groups of actors. These included the following:

- verification by all the actors of the functional nature of the municipality and its performance;
- providing better information to the donors and development organisations and the elected councillors as a basis for better decision-making (in terms of steering);
- providing better information to citizens in order to improve their contribution to/understanding of decisions and participation in the implementation of these decisions;
- promoting the notion of accountability among elected councillors and of democratic control among citizens;
- improving each actor's understanding of the role of other actors and the inter-relationships between these roles and their complementary nature;
- building the analytical capacity of local governance, particularly with elected councillors;
- learning about development and local governance, etc.

In theory, only two approaches were possible:

- **Evaluation:** which is a valuable tool for any kind of organisation. Its main purpose is to provide a basis for decision making following critical examination of a situation and the lessons learned from previous experience. The evaluation period gives the organisation an opportunity to gain information,

assess actual facts, ask questions, think about and try to project itself into the future, and to take decisions likely to improve the situation.

- **Self-evaluation:** which, as experts agree, is one of the best methods of evaluating the performance of an organisation. Its particular feature is that the main actor is the organisation and its various components. In the present case, for example, this would be the elected officers of the municipality and the various actors with whom they work.

In practice, it was obviously in the interests of the various stakeholders to use a self-evaluation approach because it could, at one and the same time, be all of the following:

- **Tool for communication and thinking:** a maximum number of actors can be made aware of the information available on the local government and take part in analysing it. They can ask each other questions and exchange views on their own experiences. This helps to flesh out individual, necessarily partial, perceptions and may well lead to a more comprehensive overview of the situation. It then becomes easier to analyse and find answers to the main concerns of the moment.

- **Learning:** as the analysis and decision-making capacities of the municipality are gradually improved, the various actors agree to listen to and learn from other people's views, and to pool their experiences. They may then raise new questions and find new and possibly better angles of analysis. In this way, self-evaluation may also help build the municipality's capacity for negotiation with the outside world since the municipality will become capable of independently developing areas of work more in keeping with its context and of calling for more targeted support.

■ **Development process:** greater responsibility on the part of the municipality for critical thinking, internal negotiation and concerted decision making means that the tasks of analysis, monitoring and guidance are carried out in a more collective way. This is a way of 'consolidating' the municipality from inside and encouraging periodical self-appraisal among councillors, as well as among other actors at the municipal level.

However, opting for self-evaluation required municipalities to have the capacity to steer the approach and meant that elected officials had to be willing to take firmer control of their future, if the exercise was not to be seen as being imposed from outside.

2.4. Mentoring of the self-evaluation strategy: a necessity

The methodological choice for an approach of self-evaluation meant that a critical point had to be discussed in detail with elected officials: how their self-evaluation was to be led. Did they feel that they had sufficient capacity to lead the exercise and to implement the approach in a relatively independent way?

3. DESIGNING THE TOOL AND TESTING THE APPROACH

3.1. Designing the tool

A participatory approach involving the organisations mentioned above and a sample of the main users was used to develop the 'local government performance self-evaluation tool' (see Table 1).¹⁵

During the design and test phases, elected officers from urban and rural municipalities in different areas of the country were consulted. They took part, as did the other groups of actors, in discussions led by the CCCs and in the self-evaluation exercises¹⁶. In parallel, a review of what was already available was drawn up by other technical and financial partners (see CARE 2001 and USAID/ARD 2000).

The objective was to design a tool that could provide every municipality that used it regularly with the following information:

The ability to lead the exercise plays a very important role and largely shapes the success of this kind of approach. While the context was very different in different municipalities, few councillors were educated or literate, many mayors and deputy mayors were still novices from the point of view of running meetings such as those of the executive or council. Many of those questioned nevertheless said that they were willing to carry out the exercise by mobilising those councillors and municipal staff best able to run meetings and speak in public (the 'village leaders', for instance). Initially, they also relied on the support of the CCC advisors.

This issue of leadership remained on the table for several months, which explains why, in the initial versions of the document, 'self-evaluation' long continued to be accompanied by the term 'assisted'. This term disappeared only after the test stage, when it became evident that local governments could, with practice and each at their own pace, come up with the internal resources needed to lead the exercise.

- how its competence was developing over time;
- the fields in which the various actors encountered problems and the nature of these problems;
- concerted solutions that could be used with different groups of actors;
- any external support required for major improvements, particularly in:
 - management and decision-making capacity;
 - the quality of services, products and achievements;
 - the democratic process and good local governance;
 - strategies for popular participation (by men and women) and resource mobilisation;
 - leadership of local development.

The entire iterative process was carried out with an ongoing concern for the tool to be:

- **as complete as possible**, while remaining 'light', so that it could be readily used by municipalities at the lowest possible cost;

15- See MATCL/DNCT-SNV-Helvetas-PACT/GTZ. 2004. *Outil d'auto évaluation des performances des collectivités territoriales*. Bamako: Ministère de l'Administration Territoriale et des Collectivités Locales, Part II. 1: performance evaluation indicators and fields.

16- In the case of the test, in particular, this included municipalities I and IV of the Bamako district, the municipalities of Moribabougou, Sanankoro Djitoumou ('Cercle' of Kati); Banamba, Benkadi ('Cercle' of Banamba); Dégnekoro, Kaladougou ('Cercle' of Dioïla); Sirakorola, Doumba ('Cercle' of Koulikoro); Tiémala Banimonotié, Danou ('Cercle' of Bougouni); Gouandiaka, Séré Moussa Ani Samou ('Cercle' of Yanfolilla); Kébila, Ména ('Cercle' of Kolondiéba); Ménaka et Inékar ('Cercle' of Ménaka).

■ **as targeted as possible**, which made it necessary to choose a small number of simple and precise indicators, even if this meant that changes in laws and decrees would make some fine-tuning necessary at later stages;

■ **as standard as possible**, so that each municipality could readily master the tool and compare its results from one year to the next or even compare its results with those of other municipalities;

■ **as comprehensible as possible**, in order to minimise incorrect interpretations of its content and any sources of bias; it was decided, for this reason, to include a section devoted to explaining its various components.¹⁷

Fields: In terms of performance, the tool was structured around **five main fields**, which were well documented (MATCL/DNCT 2003): 'internal organisation', 'administrative and financial management', 'resources mobilisation (financial and human)', 'local development planning and programming' and 'local government services, products and investments'.

Deciding on the indicators for each of the fields of competence to be evaluated and the assessment levels for each of these indicators led to more lively exchanges between the various stakeholders. A number of factors played a part in this:

■ the sensibilities (indicators) and ambitions (assessment levels) of each stakeholder;

■ changes in topical themes and concerns, over time;

■ at the beginning of the process, the lack of regular attendance of some stakeholders' representatives from one meeting to the next, which often meant that discussions were re-opened on points on which consensus had previously been reached.

The moderators of the discussion were always able to settle discussions by referring to the basic principles that had been adopted in a consensual way and to the texts of existing laws and regulations. Nevertheless, this situation helps explain why some people lost motivation during the process, as well as why the length of time it would take was underestimated and how many draft versions would be drawn up at the end of the various meetings.

Indicators: Each of the five fields was ultimately defined by **an average of six indicators** (tangible, verifiable elements highlighting any changes that might take place), based on the main obligations legally incumbent on municipalities and on some aspects of the operation of an 'ideal' municipality.

The tool contains a total of **33 indicators**, which can be evaluated and monitored from one year to the next. They were drawn up in keeping with various criteria so as to be

■ **circumscribed in time**, even if the reference period might vary: the previous year, the current year or a specific time (for instance: *the municipality has actively collected taxes and duties from the previous year; the municipality's administrative accounts clearly and correctly describe all the accounting transactions during the year*);

■ **sensitive** to change over time, from one reference period to the next;

■ **measurable**, in quantitative terms, referring to figures or rates (for instance: *mean attendance rate of elected officers at sessions in the last year, number of ordinary sessions held during the last year*); in qualitative terms, they were made easy to measure by devising **four assessment levels** based on an increasing scale of values and on standards (reference values) specified in the active legislation (for instance: *the municipality has not mobilised any additional resources/the municipality has mobilised less than 25% of its investment budget from donors and the population/... between 25% and 50%.../...over 50%...*). To facilitate reviews for each field, each assessment level was allocated a **score** whose method of calculation is explained in detail in Part III of the guide on the self-evaluation tool.¹⁸

■ **reliable**, in that the data are objectively verifiable;¹⁹

■ **user-friendly**, because they have to be meaningful and understandable for the various **groups of actors involved**.

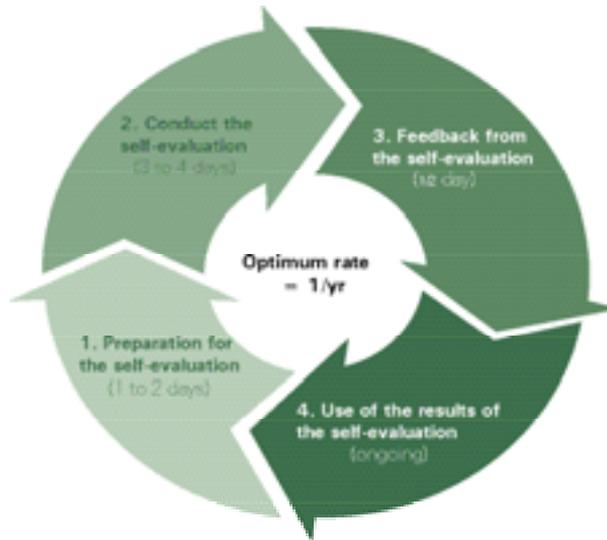
17- See MATCL/DNCT-SNV-Helvetas-PACT/GTZ. 2004. Part II.2: explanation of fields.

18- See MATCL/DNCT-SNV-Helvetas-PACT/GTZ (2004).

19- Possible sources of verification are listed in Part II.2 of the guide (MATCL/DNCT-SNV-Helvetas-PACT/GTZ. 2004).

3.2. Designing a method of use

Figure 3: Sample self-evaluation cycle



In order to act as a reference framework, the main stages of the approach were developed as an outline when the approach was being designed.

Following the test phase, the content of each stage was refined in order to provide 'methods' in keeping with different contexts and to highlight some points requiring the specific attention of mayors and the people instructed by mayors to carry out the process.²⁰

The methods were intended to be educational and appropriate for a target group of different levels working in different contexts. The aim was to explain, propose and present alternatives that municipalities could use from the outset or during the process without altering the approach or losing its comparative element (changes in performance from one year to the next).

3.3. Testing and finalisation of the approach

If you don't fight, you've fought well.

(Bwa proverb)

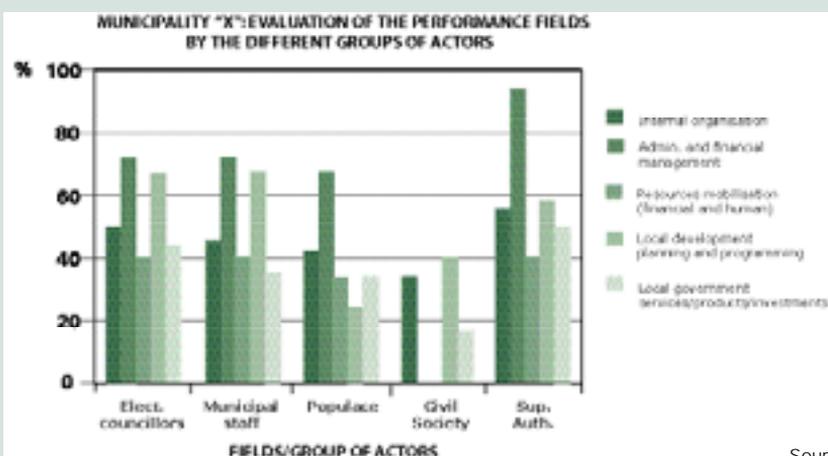
The test phase, scheduled for a period of three months (see Table 1), was run by the CCCs with a sample of volunteer local governments (3% of the municipalities of Mali), assisted by advisors from the partner organisations.

The test phase brought various considerations to light and these were analysed at a workshop. At this stage, a moderator who had not taken part in the drafting process was selected to help the partner organisations to stand back sufficiently and make the most of any lessons.

Salient points emerging from the test were related to the tool and, in particular, to methods that had intentionally been only slightly formalised in the test version, so as not to curb any initiatives by the leaders of the self-evaluation exercise and their mentors.

20- See MATCL/DNCT-SNV-Helvetas-PACT/GTZ. 2004. Part III: methods for the use of the local government performance self-evaluation tool.

Figure 4: Evaluation of the performance fields



Source: Le Bay, S.

With regard to the **tool**, the following main adjustments were proposed:

- reformulating indicators and definitions of indicators and adjusting some assessment levels to avoid any ambiguity or reluctance on the part of users;
- specifying the timescale of some indicators in a more precise way;
- modifying the list of indicators by group of actors, depending on their pertinence in terms of their theoretical access to information.

With regard to the **methodology**, the main proposals were related to the moderation and organisation of the exercise, which largely shape its success.

In respect to moderation, it was proposed that people instructed by the mayor should take the following steps:

- ensure that everyone is aware of his/her role in each stage of the exercise, for instance: moderator, co-moderator, note-taker or even process support and counselling (role played initially by the CCC advisors and the other technical and financial partners involved);
- study the possibility of involving civil society, or even staff from deconcentrated State services, in the leadership team alongside municipal staff or members of the municipal executive;
- translate some key words or concepts into the local language ahead of time, or even translate the whole tool, depending on the public involved;

- introduce indicators related to gender issues with reference to the surrounding culture;
- work in parallel with several groups of actors in order to shorten the time needed for the exercise;
- draw up a summary after interviews with each group of actors so that the data can be verified and then analysed and fed back;
- in rural municipalities, present the tool and the results from each group of actors in a visual way in order to facilitate feedback and proposals for action;
- use the reference documents only as a last resort for verification (of a score for an indicator) and discuss reasoned answers rather than the scores themselves (the score is the very last stage);
- develop strategies to cope with people monopolising the floor and having a strong influence on discussions;
- prepare the feedback workshop well: present a summary of the various views of municipal performance, and analyse it without calling into question the answers given or seeking consensus at any cost;
- help the actors to devise concrete proposals for action and to share responsibility for carrying them out.

For organising the exercise, the mayor should:

- issue advance invitations to take part in the self-evaluation and feedback to the various groups; ensure that these groups are properly represented (in both quantitative and qualitative terms) and that the same participants take part throughout the self-evaluation process;

- respect the availability of the different groups of actors, while not leaving more than a week between the various self-evaluation and feedback sessions;
- submit the 'questionnaire' to the supervisory authority in advance, so that any responses from the supervisory authority (which might not be available to take part in the exercise in the municipality) can be taken into account in the feedback;
- in the short term, set up an archiving system to facilitate information searches (MATCL/DNCT-DNAM-AFVP-SNV-PACT/GTZ. 2004);
- include the costs²¹ incurred by the exercise in the municipal budget and ensure that all the actors are aware of the ways in which they are supported;

- for the future, plan for any costs incurred in mentoring the exercise, with a view to regular use of the approach, bearing in mind that subsidised CCC services are likely to come to an end.

All these points were taken into account when the tool was being finalised. This stage proved to be rather long (see Table 1). Although testing did not call the work carried out up to then into question, having to make some final adjustments, after drafting several provisional versions, led to a degree of 'exhaustion'. In keeping with the deadlines required by the tendering procedure coordinated by the DNCT, the publication was not available until April 2004—more than two and a half years after the launch of the process.

4. USE AND RELEVANCE OF THE APPROACH

While the test bore out most of the hypotheses connected with the self-evaluation approach, its effects became more evident after 2005 when it was used on a larger scale. In June 2006, 17% of the municipalities had carried out the exercise at least once.

If camels spent the day gossiping about their calluses, they wouldn't get round to eating.

(Tamashek proverb)

4.1. Publication and dissemination of the self-evaluation tool

The publication, with a preface by the Minister for Territorial Administration and Local Government, symbolised a common endeavour. It reflected the completion of a participatory design process. At the same time, it meant that some of the people who had worked on the tool up to this point chose to stand down.

However, in the view of the initiators of the process, it was more necessary than ever to take a fresh look at new challenges over and above those overcome since August 2001. A new 'building site' was facing them: designing a support system for the use of the tool. The aim was to present it to users nationally and, depending on demand, to support municipal actors as they carried out their first self-evaluation exercises.

As municipal elections were scheduled for June 2004, just after publication of the tool, the MATCL decided to postpone distribution until the new teams were in office. The DNCT sent each municipality a 'mayor's toolkit' that contained all the reference and guidance documents that councillors and municipal staff would need in order to perform their duties properly. The CCCs and other potential mentors for the exercise also received several copies of the publication.

This tool was only one of the many instruments in the toolkit, so it was necessary to raise awareness of the tool among people other than the CCC advisors and municipalities that had played a part in its design and testing, especially as some municipal teams had not been re-elected.

4.2. The main effects of the approach

Over time, there has been a perceptible improvement in municipal competencies. While some effects were predicted and expected, others were not.

Participants in the exercise learned more from the discussions of the indicators than from the choice of a level and the ultimate score. Even though some people's initial instinct, at the outset, was to try to set a level, they found it difficult to persuade the others if they could not come up with any cogent arguments. **Building an argument together** and

21- This depends largely on the number of villages/fractions of nomadic tribes making up the municipality, its area, the level of participation that the mayor wants and the length of the exercise. The cost varies on average from XOF 50,000 to 500,000 (EUR 1 = XOF 656). The main costs are elected officers' fees, transport, participants' meals, and communication costs in connection with the exercise. Travel by the supervisory authority may entail additional costs.

comparing points of view was a way for participants to come to a better understanding of their own role and the roles of other participants within the municipality.

As a result of a number of problems that my association has encountered, I now know that I can negotiate some matters with the mayor.

(Statement in 02/2006 by the chairwoman of an association of shea butter producers, 'Cercle' of Kati, Koulikoro Region, Mali)

As everyone has an opportunity to voice his or her opinion on various issues, the exercise helps to develop a sense of constructive criticism and self-criticism. Everyone needs to understand the difference between being critical and 'attacking' someone. While mayors are used to come back from political opponents, they are less willing to take criticism from municipal staff. In practice, they are not used to employees speaking out on such issues, particularly in front of third parties. It is therefore very important for the moderators to manage exchanges during the exercise and to advise the various groups, encouraging them, for instance, to take their concerns to the mayor in a timely way and not just bring them up during the exercise. In order to pre-empt any negative points of which they are aware and which might be brought up, mayors are increasingly likely to bring them up themselves.

The exercise helps users identify the main strengths and weaknesses of the municipality. When feedback is being given, presenting the main performance fields in a visual way helps analysis and enables comparison with the prior situation. Users can see whether or not the municipality is carrying out its duties and providing the expected services, as well as the quality of these services.

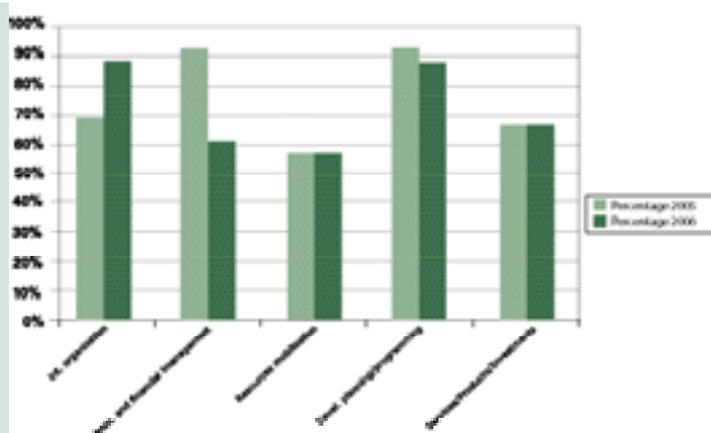
Following the self-evaluation exercise, I was contacted by a mayor who asked me to help him to put together his ANICT plan so that nobody could say that he had not respected the procedures.

(Statement by a CCC advisor, 'Cercle' of Kati, Koulikoro Region, Mali, May 2006)

In all cases, the municipal exercises led to the drafting of institutional and organisational improvement plans. What matters, when the results are fed back, is the pooling of ideas and the quality of discussions among the actors. This shapes the relevance of the measures to be planned and the participants' commitment to implementing them. This is also the time when these actors become aware that they must all perform their duties properly if the municipality is to be run properly.

In 2006, following the test phase of the self-evaluation tool, frameworks for consultation between municipalities and civil society were being set up in the local governments of the Koulikoro region so that any lack of understanding could be permanently ironed out.

Figure 5: Comparison of performance by field for sample municipality



Source: Le Bay, S.

The results achieved and the outcome of discussions made it **easier for mayors to take decisions**. It was also **easier for them to allocate responsibility for the implementation of these measures**.

If a needle falls into a deep well, few will go down it but many will look.

(Senoufo proverb)

In municipalities in which the exercise has been repeated, it is **possible to evaluate capacity-building effects** by comparing the measures taken under the plan with any advances in the level of each field's indicators. This information may **provide councillors with arguments** on which they

can base their negotiations for aid-not just from the CCCs but also from the donors and development organisations. As these exercises continue, **municipalities also become better at analysis**.

The **information on municipal life that is available to the actors is improved** because a great deal of information is provided on the operation of the municipality (town hall, executive, working committees) and its relations with other actors, even outside the municipality. Because every participant can ask questions, the elected officers are made aware that **they are accountable**, not just from the point of view of the supervisory authority's checks on legality, but also to the people.

5. OWNERSHIP, SUSTAINABILITY AND REPLICATION OF THE APPROACH

Saying 'fire' doesn't cause one.

(Bozo proverb)

5.1. Signs of ownership

Given that municipalities have only recently started to use the tool, it is more realistic to talk about signs of ownership than of ownership per se. Some of the factors discussed below may help facilitate ownership and ensure that it can be sustained among the various stakeholders. It is encouraging to note that all the municipalities that carried out the exercise for the first time have so far repeated it in the following year.

Municipalities freely choose to carry out the self-evaluation exercise as there is no external 'pressure' (legislation, sanctions or incentives). It is up to the mayors to decide to run the exercise, at the time that best suits them, and to channel whatever budget they want into it. This lack of 'obligation' nevertheless makes the mentoring process rather difficult. The CCC advisors can freely decide whether to provide municipalities with initial instruction, and mentoring depends on the pace of demand, which may lead some organisations to encourage their planning to be more consistent.

In some 'cercles', municipalities are also devising ways to **facilitate the self-evaluation process and follow up the decisions to which this process leads**. For this purpose, the local guidance committees (CLO)²² are setting up small monitoring units that include mayors and staff from decentralised technical services and external development partners.

Municipal leaders from various authorities in the same 'cercle' are **pooling their experience and helping one another to prepare for self-evaluation exercises**.

Mayors, together with the process moderators and mentors, generally tend to **adapt the methods to their own context and needs** (municipal financial resources have a direct effect, for instance, on method options, as was discussed in section 3.3). Although provisions had already been made for various alternatives, the mayors have not been at all reluctant to be creative in facilitating the exercise or ensuring that its effects are more sustainable.

The tool is also being adapted in terms of its indicators. Over and above the revisions necessitated by changes in legislation, the tendency is to fine-tune the list of indicators depending on the groups of actors involved. This was already part and

22- The CLOs (Comités Locaux d'Orientation) are responsible for implementing the decentralisation process and for defining, guiding, monitoring and evaluating the technical support offered to the local governments of 'cercles' in the context of the National Programme in Support of Local Government.

parcel of the approach because the representatives of the five groups of actors (see Figure 2) do not have to give views on all the indicators. In practice, the issue is not so much one of avoiding putting an unnecessary burden on participants or of taking account of their main centres of interest, but rather avoiding the representatives of a group having to admit that they are unable to give an opinion on an indicator because they lack information.

Generally speaking, as the approach has been **published**, some **users are rather hesitant** to change any of it. Between one exercise and the next, municipalities therefore take time for further discussion with the mentors of various indicators and the methods used in order to shape both the environment surrounding the self-evaluation exercise and the quality of the results obtained.

According to surveys among **people who have taken part at least once in a self-evaluation exercise, over half are able to explain the main stages, propose improvements to the approach and also cite the measures included in their plan.** There is an ongoing demand to **translate the tool into the various languages** spoken in Mali. Mayors and leaders see this as a necessity if all the participants are to understand the exercise and play a full part in it. The call for publication in the various languages comes from those who are not literate in French. Discussions with users at the sub-regional seminar 'Building capacities for monitoring and evaluation of decentralisation and local governance in West Africa: exchange of experience and learning' (Foranim Consult. 2006) bore out these trends, as did subsequent discussions, during field visits, with participants from neighbouring countries and users from some municipalities close to the capital.

To a certain extent, the notion of ownership also needs to be tackled from the point of view of other local government levels, which were not initially targeted. **'Cercle' councils, for instance, have already used the approach to measure their performance.** These experiments by municipal councillors show that the list of indicators needs to be specifically adapted to this level of government.

Is it also possible to speak of **ownership by the donors and development organisations and the MATCL?** Some trends might lead us to think that the answer is 'yes'. In early 2004, for instance, a working group was set up by the partners of the Malian government to think about a common list of indicators for measuring the effects of the financial support channelled into local government. They used 58% of the tool's indicators. Since 2005, most of the partner NGOs in the Shared Governance Programme (PGP) have been using 90% of the tool's indicators in 36% of Malian municipalities to draw up municipal baselines as a basis for capacity-building action plans. In the same year, the TFPs in the various regions of Mali forged relationships to train their staff to mentor this approach and to introduce municipalities to performance self-evaluation practices.

From the point of view of the MATCL, guidelines have been issued to CCC advisors asking them to rally round mentoring tasks for the self-evaluation exercise. During his various field visits, the Ministry's Decentralisation Advisor regularly undertakes surveys among mayors and representatives of the supervisory authority in order to monitor how the process is being used and what effects it is having in local governments. In 2006, in order to encourage a competitive spirit among municipalities, the Ministry also devised a national competition in which their results for the period 2003 to mid-2006 were compared in three priority areas (local democratic governance, promotion of local development and resource mobilisation) with prizes for those obtaining the best results. Sixty-four percent of the tool's indicators were used for this purpose.

5.2. Sustainability

If a fisherman sells his boat for a camel, he has made some serious decisions.

(Songhai proverb)

There are still some unanswered questions as regards the sustainability of the approach; whether the value of the approach will stay the same over time is another important issue.

Monitoring of the use of the approach by the various stakeholders, and the surveys conducted, show that **mentoring is extremely important** during the initial exercises. In the new specifications (2006) for each CCC operator, the annual self-evaluation exercise comes under the heading 'assistance with the operation of the local government and its organs'. The winding up of the CCCs, scheduled for 2007, nevertheless raises the question of the availability and accessibility of this mentoring (particularly in regard to financing).²³ Although many councillors may be re-elected in the forthcoming elections and, therefore, there may be a number of councillors available who have already been trained to lead the exercise, most mayors believe that external counselling and advice during the exercise is valuable. Is this just a lack of confidence in their own ability to steer the process and lead the exercise? Only the future will tell.

Throughout Mali, increasing numbers of donors and development organisations are joining forces to play a technical and financial part in **supporting the system for mentoring the use of the tool**. Various programmes have initiated partnerships to support this, along with the measures planned by various state organisations. It nevertheless takes time to provide coverage throughout the country.

Other **complementary tools for use by local governments are being developed** in parallel. For instance, since 2003 the donors and development organisations, in conjunction with the National Directorate for the Archives of Mali (DNAM), have been helping the DNCT to design a practical guide for the management of local government archives (MATCL/DNCT-DNAM-AFVP-SNV-PACT/ GTZ. 2004) and the introduction of a system for mentoring, monitoring and evaluating municipal performance (DNCT-DNAM-SNV-PACT/GTZ. 2005). This has helped to flesh out the initial system by making it easier for municipalities to access basic data that they can use in their analysis and decision-making work²⁴, not just during the exercise but also in their day-to-day operations.

Local governments that have adapted the tool during successive exercises are asking **how the changes they have made are to be validated**. Moreover, these changes are not being capitalised

on. Most would like the State to take on this responsibility, especially in regard to indicators. Should the tool be standardised to ensure that it always mirrors existing laws and to enable municipalities to compare their results from year to year and with one another? Or should each municipality be free to develop its own tool? Both options have pros and cons that need to be discussed by users and the tool's original designers (chiefly MATCL/DNCT).

The observation during exercises that **users are in some cases very quick to introduce changes** raises a number of questions. For example, there is the situation where mayors have reduced the list of indicators for the various groups of actors involved. The main consequence of all this fine-tuning will ultimately be that the results obtained from year to year are no longer comparable. Would it not be useful to ask whether, in future, the best option would be to ensure that all the groups are in a position to answer the maximum number of questions? In the case of changes to methods, a list of those elements that absolutely have to be included to ensure the quality/reliability of the results obtained should also be drawn up.

Over and above these thoughts about the use of the tool, which are likely to determine whether or not it is sustainable, the **results of exercises are coming under increasing scrutiny**. This not from the point of view of the action plans drawn up, but from the point of view of the scores achieved, and it is coming from actors outside the municipalities. This runs counter to the self-evaluation approach, where the results belong to those carrying out the exercise. The main issue, often raised by both the TFPs and the State, is that of connecting aid to local government performance (overall performance or performance in specific fields). Municipalities that are performing well would then have greater drawing rights.²⁵ Such a development would make it necessary for all Malian municipalities to carry out the exercise and publish their scores. If this were actually implemented, it might well introduce a major bias during exercises and could, in the long run, impede ownership of the approach by users.

These are developments that are not specific to Mali. They are part and parcel of an ever-growing

23- Until 2007, the task of CCC operators is to prepare, implement and monitor the operation of the Services Communs aux Collectivités Territoriales Cercles et Communes (SECOM - Common Services for Local Government in 'Cercles' and Municipalities).

24- The chance of municipalities reaching a high performance level for indicator 18 ('the municipality has a file storage and archiving system') is then greatly improved.

25- The local government financing mechanism is administered by ANICT (National Local Government Investment Agency) and is based on certain weighting criteria (in 2006, for instance, population, rate of collection of the Regional and Local Development Tax, remoteness and poverty).

trend among the donors to introduce monitoring systems for decentralisation and local governance in which the impact of financial aid is measured by a common list of performance indicators. As the amount channelled into budgetary aid increases, a number of networks and working groups are working on this issue globally and are attempting where possible to forge links with poverty-reduction strategies (Arndt and Oman. 2006; Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi. 2006). In Mali, developments of this type include, for instance, the introduction by the European Union in 2006 (Foranim Consult 2006 and <http://www.snmali.org/actus/paradeu-mali.pdf>) of a system that includes 12 indicators²⁶, with a more comprehensive set of indicators to gradually be developed so that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) can also be taken into account. The aim is to be able to monitor the institutional reform process in greater detail, as the indicators will make it possible to assess how the government is using its policy resources and whether interim results (decided in a concerted manner) have been achieved.²⁷

5.3. Examples of replication

Listen carefully because everything speaks, everything talks, everything has something to tell us.

(Dogon proverb)

While, in the development area, a standard recipe covering all situations is no more than a mirage, 're-inventing the wheel' is still very common practice. It is often due to a lack of information or a lack of confidence in the reliability of an existing tool or approach. While no strategy to promote the replication of the 'local government performance self-evaluation tool' has actually been drawn up, it would appear that the stakeholders, founders, users and supporters of the process have helped to disseminate the information widely. This has led to a **proliferation effect in West Africa** (see Table 1).

Some factors have encouraged replication of the approach. Many countries, in the midst of decentralisation, are looking for practical tools that can be readily mastered and immediately put to use or which provide a starting point. Mali has much to offer as it is something of a pioneer in decentralisation

and local governance. Growing numbers of exchange visits by various groups (representatives of TFPs, State services, local government organisations, civil society, etc.) are helping to disseminate the practices currently being used. Donors and development organisations are increasingly keen to capitalise on and share experiences between the different countries. This is also encouraging them, as in the present case, to contribute to publications paving the way for the large-scale dissemination of these experiences. The staff of aid organisations are also increasingly mobile in the sub-region and are drawing on the experience acquired in order to adapt it to different contexts and types of demand.

Niger

An example of replication in Niger is discussed in the case study 'Planning and monitoring/evaluation in municipalities, focusing on poverty reduction' (SNV-Niger 2005a, b; Republic of Niger/SNV-Niger 2005; Satta 2006). Here, therefore, we shall discuss only some elements by way of introduction.

Following a test phase run by SNV in 2005, in conjunction with Niger's devolved services and other partners, the tool is now being used on a much wider scale. Now that alliances have been forged with other TFPs, the aim is for the system to be institutionalised by the Ministry of Territorial and Community Development (MATDC). This system is modelled on processes that have been tried out in Mali and the lessons that have been learned about participatory planning of municipal development (MDRI. 2000) and self-evaluation of local government performance. These two approaches have been combined to provide answers to the concerns of the municipal authorities elected in 2004, who are required to undertake development measures and properly perform their duties and the State's concerns to achieve the millennium development goals and poverty-reduction strategy at the local level.²⁸

The self-evaluation tool takes the same form as in Mali (33 indicators and four assessment levels to which a score is allocated). Some adaptations have been made, particularly in terms of the fields (three out of five concentrate on municipal functions) and the nature of the indicators (11 have been taken up and the others have been reformulated to take

26- Six indicators are connected with decentralisation, three with the interdependence between decentralisation and devolution and three with reform of the State. All come from various strategy documents providing a framework for institutional reform. There has been agreement with the Malian authorities on the final list and the associated reference values and targets, responsibility for data production and collection, verification sources, deadlines for production and possible revision mechanisms.

27- As the European Commission noted in its Communication 'Good governance and development' (20 October 2003) 'developing appropriate processes to identify and agree upon governance-related indicators remains a challenge', especially in Mali, where the statistical apparatus leaves much to be desired.

28- This aim is also part of the partnership agreement signed in October 2004 by SNVWorld and the UNDP.

account of a particular context, specifically to include more gender-related points). From the point of view of methods, leadership of the exercise is the task of previously trained resource persons (representatives appointed from different socio-economic strata), working within a municipal technical committee chaired by the mayor.

Benin

The example of replication in Benin is the result of a general reaction by local governments to a UNDP report evaluating their performance (UNDP 2004 and <http://www.snvmali.org/actus/beinnanb.pdf>). In 2005, with a view to contesting the report's findings, the local governments commissioned the National Association of Benin Municipalities (ANCB) to represent their points of view. The ANCB asked GTZ, Helvetas, SNV and UNDP to help mentor a process to design a reliable approach and a tool that could measure progress in municipal performance, nationally. In addition, they wanted further support with the ongoing process of decentralisation by building their monitoring and evaluation capacity and finding ways in which locally available resources could be transparently managed.

A steering group within the ANCB is working with the donors and development organisations and has the task of validating each stage undertaken by the departmental associations. The design process draws on the process used in Mali. Some fields have been adapted (four out of five have been included). The indicators are being devised, and training is planned for mentors, as is a system for centralising and analysing data.

The results will be disseminated at departmental and national levels so that municipalities can better negotiate the support they need. Thinking is already taking place about ways of managing possible problems (competition between municipalities, for instance) and remedying them (by introducing a control mechanism for the information collected, for instance, especially in the run-up to elections).

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso is keen to steer the implementation of decentralisation in a more efficient way (see <http://www.snvmali.org/actus/burkina.pdf>). For this purpose, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation (MATD) is introducing a monitoring and evaluation system to steer the process in a more coherent way and to forge links with devolution, national policies on good governance and poverty reduction, and the development of the legislative framework. A national coordination unit, attached to the MATD General Secretariat, is responsible for management and works with a mixed committee, including State bodies, TFPs, PRSP, etc.

In addition to monitoring general indicators and introducing frameworks for concerted action, Burkina Faso plans to draw on Mali's experience to carry out self-evaluations using specific indicators. The aim of this approach is to 'force the actors to draw on the resources available to them to find the best possible solutions' by placing them in a position to ask, 'what quality of performance do we want to achieve to work towards the targeted effects?'

At present, the actors of decentralisation are drawing up criteria for quality and the desired quality levels. This is based on their own perceptions and is a first step towards improving municipal performance. Although the approach is intended to promote self-management by municipalities, it is also expected to promote the concerted inter-municipal action likely to raise awareness and facilitate decision making.

These examples of the experiments that various actors (development organisations, municipal associations, the State) are involved in, show the relevance of the monitoring and evaluation needs being put forward. They also highlight the importance of self-evaluation approaches when monitoring and evaluation systems that aim to make the stakeholders permanently responsible are introduced. There is little doubt that transparent borrowing from everyone's experience paves the way for rapid and more efficient reactions during the design and implementation of relevant approaches.

6. Prospects

The experience gained from self-evaluation of local government performance has a great deal of potential to open up prospects for those actors who are keen to improve not only their monitoring and evaluation capacity but their effectiveness in terms of local democracy and development. Over and above the replication experiments discussed here, experience in Mali has also been a source of inspiration for other actors working in similar situations.

For example, in 2006, a number of **private-sector actors** endeavoured to promote economic development based on promising agricultural options. They encouraged critical thinking by basic cooperatives about the operation of their organisations, the capacity they needed to build and the measures to be taken by local producers' unions, in conjunction with their umbrella organisation. The Association of Professional Rural Organisations (AOPP), with the support of their technical partners, has developed a simple tool for the self-evaluation of the management capacity of basic cooperatives, along with a set of methods (Traoré, Wenninck and Babin. 2006) enabling wide-ranging participation by the actors involved, as well as collective learning through discussions structured around five management fields²⁹, 18 indicators and three assessment levels.

In late 2002, drawing on the experience gained with local government, SNV, like many other technical partners providing aid and advice for **civil organisations**, was keen to work with these organisations to find more targeted ways of building their capacity. This led to the idea of the participatory design of a tool responding to the needs of the various kinds of civil organisations - one that could measure their progress. One of the challenges was that this strategy should meet the technical partners' concerns during the capacity-building period and also make it possible for the civil organisations themselves to monitor the

progress of their performance sustainably and independently from any external actors. In early 2004, this process led to the publication of a self-evaluation guide and tool (see SNV-MALI 2004, republished in 2006), focusing on three main fields and broken down into five indicators³⁰, which were further broken down into five sub-indicators in the form of questions.

As these processes are designed and used, they offer an opportunity for democratic debate between groups of actors. They enable all the participants to improve their position and fine-tune their role. However, experience shows that, in addition to the critical points discussed above, each actor has to keep an eye on changes in the overall context of decentralisation. These changes, which often provide a starting point for fresh experiments, continue to have a major influence when the tools are being used. In multi-actor processes in which relationships are constantly changing, steps need to be taken to ensure that issues remain topical.

After a number of years of support, the tolerance threshold for defects in local government performance seems to be declining. The State, donors, development organisations and municipal associations are placing increasing stress on best practice, especially in regard to accountability and compliance with management procedures for public funds. Technical support is becoming more targeted and its cost will, in the near future, be directly borne by local governments, and new criteria are being developed³¹ to make access to financial aid (especially additional funds) more selective. These factors, as well as the ongoing transfer of competencies from the State to local authorities, are laying firm foundations for these authorities to use tools that can help them become responsible for their own performance.

29- The five fields are (1) governance and leadership, (2) social cohesion and understanding, (3) member services, (4) internal resources (human, financial and material) and (5) external relations.

30- The three main fields were (1) internal organisation (systems, structures, staff, etc.), (2) external relations with other actors and (3) services and products offered by the organisation. The five indicators included four 'standard' indicators and a 'specific' indicator in keeping with each type of civil organisations, its fields of action and its particular target groups.

31- In 2006, for instance, ANICT's management board decided that local governments' rate of mobilisation of internal resources should be a criterion for receiving financial aid.

ANNEX I: ACRONYMS

AOPP	Association des Organisations Professionnelles Paysannes/Association of Professional Rural Organisations
AMM	Association des Municipalités du Mali/Association of Malian Municipalities
ANCB	Association Nationale des Communes du Bénin/National Association of Benin Municipalities
ANICT	Agence Nationale des Investissements des Collectivités Territoriales/National Local Government Investment Agency
CCC	Centre de Conseil Communal/Municipal Advisory Centre
CCN	Cellule de Coordination Nationale des Appuis Techniques aux Collectivités/National Coordination Unit for Technical Support for Local Government
CLO	Comité Local d'Orientation/Local Guidance Committee
Communicances	Consultancy, communication and advertising agency
DNAM	Direction Nationale des Archives du Mali/National Directorate for the Archives of Mali
DNCT	Direction Nationale des Collectivités Territoriales/National Directorate for Local Government
Foranim Consult	Training, leadership, consultancy office
GIS	Geographical Information System
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation Agency
Helvetas	Swiss Association for International Cooperation
KIT	Royal Tropical Institute
MATCL	Ministère de l'Administration Territoriale et des Collectivités Locales/Ministry of Territorial Administration and Local Government (Mali)
MATD	Ministère de l'Administration Territoriale et de la Décentralisation / Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation (Burkina Faso)
MATDC	Ministère de l'Aménagement du Territoire et du Développement Communautaire/Ministry of Territorial and Community Development (Niger)
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MSI	Management Systems International
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PACT	Programme d'Appui aux Collectivités Territoriales de la GTZ/GTZ's Local Government Support Programme (followed on from PRODILO in 2002)
PAD	Programme d'Appui à la Décentralisation d'Helvetas/Helvetas' Decentralisation Support Programme (became PAAD in 2005: Programme d'Appui aux Acteurs de la Décentralisation/Support Programme for the Actors of Decentralisation)
PARAD	Programme d'Appui à la Réforme Administrative et à la Décentralisation/Support Programme for Administrative Reform and Decentralisation (9th European Development Fund)
PDCM	Programme d'appui au Développement des Communes de Ménaka de la SNV/SNV's Support Programme for the Development of the Municipalities of Ménaka
PDRK	Programme d'Appui à la Décentralisation dans la Région de Koulikoro de la SNV/SNV's Support Programme for Decentralisation in the Koulikoro Region
PDUB	Programme de Développement Urbain de Bamako de la SNV/SNV's Programme for the Urban Development of Bamako
PGP	Programme Gouvernance Partagée/Shared Governance Programme (MSI/CARE/Save the Children consortium financed by USAID)
PRODILO	Promotion des Initiatives Locales de la GTZ/GTZ's Promotion of Local Initiatives (project closed in December 2001 and incorporated into PACT)
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
REDL	Réseau de Réflexion et d'Échanges sur le Développement Local/Local Development Reflection and Discussion Network
SECOM	Services Communs aux Collectivités Territoriales Cercles et Communes/Common Services for Local Government in 'Cercles' and Municipalities
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
TDRL	Taxe de Développement Régional et Local/Regional and Local Development Tax
TFPs	Donors and Development Organisations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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ANNEX III: INSTITUTIONS AND RESOURCE PERSONS

Institution	Forename and Name	Telephone	Email
MATCL	Ibrahima SYLLA	(+223) 222 42 12 (+223) 222 42 67	
DNCT	Adama SISSOUMA	(+223) 229 72 98	dnct@afribone.net.ml
CCN	Cheick Mohamed SAMAKE	(+223) 223 72 97	ccn@ccnmali.org
SNV-Mali	Sonia LE BAY	(+223) 223 33 47 (+223) 223 33 48	slebay@snvworld.org
	Bakary COULIBALY	(+223) 226 24 71	bcoulibaly@snvworld.org
HELVETAS (PAAD)	Moussoulimoune Yéhiya MAÏGA	(+223) 265 10 39	moussoulimoune.maiga@helvetas.org
PACT/GTZ	Dirk BETKE	(+223) 223 62 63	dirk.betke@gtz.de
PGP	Youssef KONE	(+223) 229 72 07	ykone@pgp-mali.org
CARE	Boubacar COULIBALY	(+223) 292 11 90	boubacar.coulibaly@afribonemali.net
CCC	Osé TIENOU	(+223) 227 23 46	ccc-kati.tienou@gtz-pact.org
	Mamoudou DIABATE	(+223) 227 23 46	ccc-kati.diabate@gtz-pact.org
	Mme KEÏTA Hawa SABE	(+223) 226 26 19	usabe@snvworld.org
	Cheikné SIDIBE	(+223) 225 60 89	csidibe@snvworld.org
	Rhaly AG MOSSA	(+223) 281 00 04	rmossa@snvworld.org
FORANIM-Consult	Gabriel COULIBALY	(+223) 224 13 52 (+223) 224 17 34	foranim@afribone.net.ml

