A Peace-Positive Approach to Natural Resource Management in the Liptako Gourma

Supporting sustainable peace in the transboundary region of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger

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EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF PEACE

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBOURG

Contents

About this paper

Disputes over the ownership of, access to, and benefits from natural resources such as land for farming or itinerant livestock herding, water points, mineral resources, and forests - including protected areas - drive and prolong violent conflict in the Liptako Gourma border region between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. These countries have been battling increasingly widespread jihadist insurgencies since 2015 and have also experienced severe political instability, with five coup d'états across the three countries since 2020.

Just as the mismanagement of natural resources can drive conflict, better management of natural resources can support peace. These root causes are also exacerbated by the dynamics of climate change and environmental degradation. This paper outlines the rationale, principles, and entry-points for peace-positive natural resource management in the Liptako Gourma region. 'Peace-positive' approaches can foster non-violent ways to resolve disputes over who has control over, access to and benefits from resources, reassert the role of the state and/or traditional authorities in resolving resource disputes, support 'infrastructures for peace' (i.e. the social norms and institutions that help to prevent and resolve violence), and address core factors behind livelihood insecurity in the Liptako Gourma region.

This paper is not a "roadmap" and nor it is meant to be provide a "silver bullet". Moreover, peace-positive natural resource management alone cannot resolve deeply rooted political, economic and social governance issues nor deliver lasting peace to this region. In the face of the extreme levels of violence present in some areas of Liptako Gourma, peace-positive natural resource management may be more effective as a conflict prevention mechanism ensuring that high-intensity conflict doesn't spread further, and to support coping and resiliency mechanism, as well as a means to accompany transitions towards stability.

The following is a collection of principles, best practices, and programmatic entry points to inform the participatory, multilevel design of such a strategy by local, national and regional actors in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger as well as their international partners to better govern natural resources in the Liptako Gourma region. The hope is that these incremental changes, in conjunction with environmentally-informed mediation strategies – outlined in the accompanying strategic note - may ultimately contribute to more grounded mediation efforts, and to more sustainable and lasting peace in this troubled region.
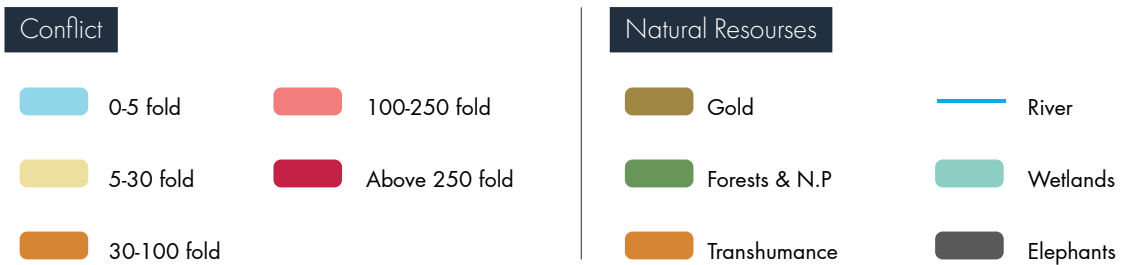
1. Rationale

The Liptako Gourma region — a 370,000 km2 lightly populated and environmentally harsh region straddling the borders of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger — has been caught in a worsening cycle of violent conflict since 2015. This is the result of a complex political, economic and security governance crisis, which is being compounded by climatic variability, poor governance, competition over scarce resources, and demographic pressures.

Violence has spread from northern Mali into Burkina Faso and Niger over the past eight years, leading to a concentrated humanitarian crisis with 30 thousand deaths and 2.8 million people displaced. As the activities of armed groups – the main ones being the Al Qaeda-affiliated Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State Sahel Province (IS-Sahel) - have proliferated, national governments and some of their international partners have often resorted to militarised, and counter-terrorism approaches to combat the insurgencies.

However, these have largely failed to quell the spread of violence, and the sometimes heavy-handed tactics used have often raised populations. Jihadist groups have used this sense of alienation, as well as outright coercion, to expand their control and influence over (primarily) rural communities. Meanwhile, all three countries in the region have since 2020 experienced coups with military factions overthrowing democratically elected civilian leaders.

Conflict

0-5 fold	100-250 fold
5-30 fold	Above 250 fold
30-100 fold	

Natural Resourses

Gold	River
Forests & N.P	Wetlands
Transhumance	Elephants
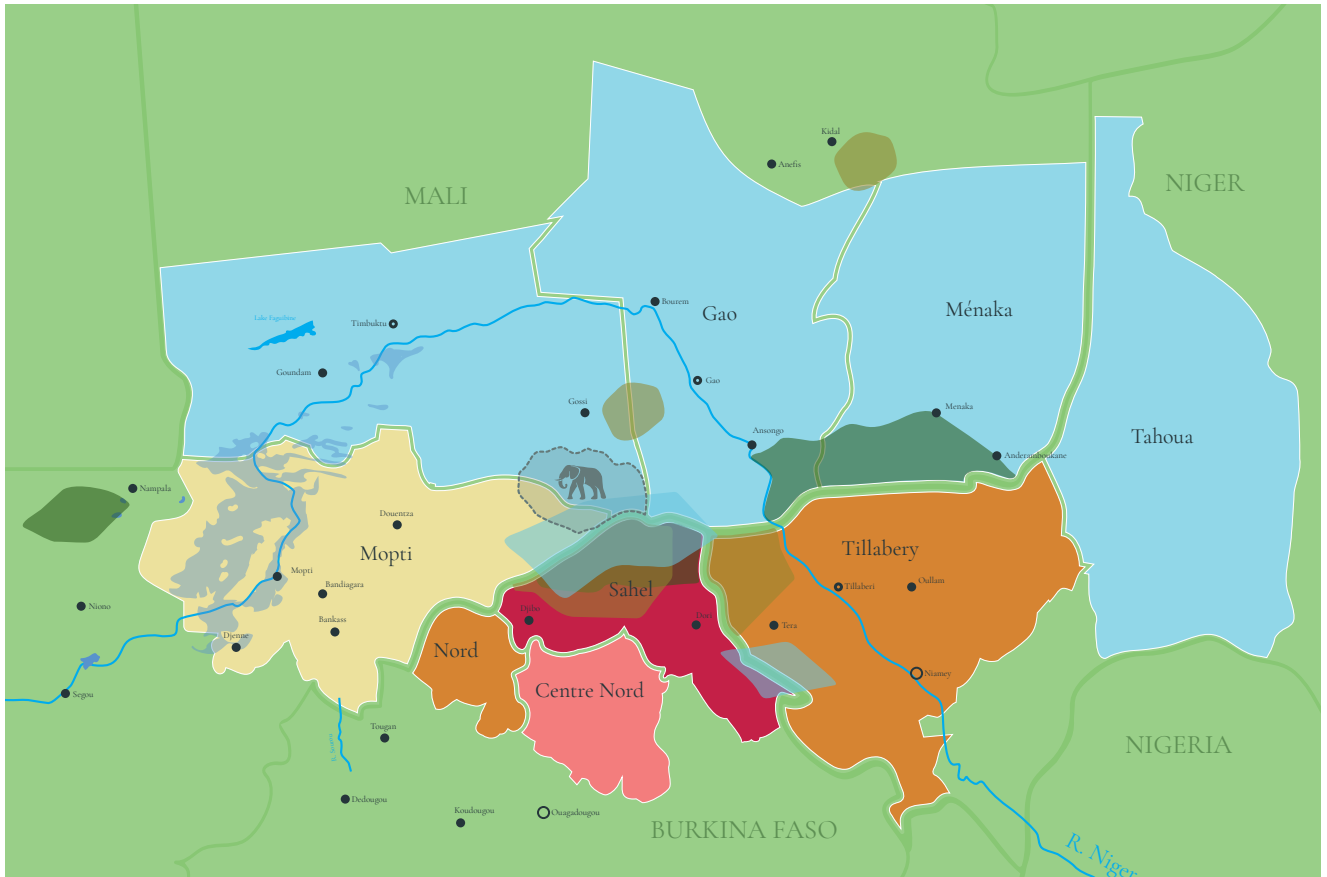
While these military juntas have triggered a shift in international partnerships, they have also led to a doubling down on often counterproductive militarized approaches. The situation more than ever requires alternative approaches that address some of the root causes of conflict. These root causes include disputes over the management of land and water, the use of farming and grazing areas, and the exploitation of mineral resources and protected areas.

These root causes are also exacerbated by the impacts of climate change, which are particularly severe in the region. These include rising temperatures, with the already hot climate predicted to exceed the preindustrial temperatures by at least 3°C by 2050,[1] as well as increasingly uncertain rainfall,[2] and extreme weather events such as droughts and flooding. As communities have different livelihood strategies, they are affected differently by climate change and resource degradation and tend to use a variety of coping mechanisms, which may, at times, clash and fuel conflict.

1 UNDP. Document de projet: Mécanisme de Stabilisation pour la Région du Liptako Gourma. 2021. Available at: https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/R11/20210813%20 eSigned%20-%20FINAL%20DOC%20PROJET%20SATABILISATION__VF.pdf

2 SIPRI. 'Climate-related security risks and Peacebuilding in Mali'. 2021. Available at: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/sipripp60.pdf

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As a result of the combined climate and security crises, the management of critical livelihood natural resources, particularly land, water sources, mining areas, and forests, underpins and exacerbates local and cross-border violent conflicts. This is especially relevant where the national and/or local and traditional authorities are less present and/or lack the legitimacy to prevent and mediate disputes over resources. In these cases, the outcomes are often in the favour of those with weapons, to the detriment of marginalised groups.

As a result, Liptako Gourma often experiences "peace-negative" natural resource management that exacerbates conflict and environmental degradation. One example of this has been a tendency to promote the sedentarisation of previously nomadic herders,[3] as well as the favouring of farmers in resource disputes, motivated by a focus on mass agricultural production.[4]

The militarised management of natural parks the Réserve partielle de faune dite des Eléphants du Gourma and the Réserve Partielle de Faune d'Ansongo-Ménaka in East Mali and the Réserve Sylvo-Pastorale et de Faune partielle du Sahel of Northern Burkina Faso is another instance of peace-negative NRM. Indeed, while conservation efforts are relatively scarce - some of the parks have been described as 'paper parks' – or non-existent on the ground,[5] the areas they cover have often become hideouts for armed groups and traffickers,[6] which leads to militarized counterterrorist responses,[7] with negative consequences for both users of natural resources and biodiversity.

The unregulated "gold rush" of artisanal mining has clear negative impacts on natural resource availability and environmental quality, from soil and water pollution from mercury and deforestation to human rights violations and illicit trade. The increasing involvement of armed groups in the informal mining sector – taxing or in some cases directly managing the mines – has created a context rife for extortion and conflict, leading Burkina Faso to ban artisanal mining in its northern areas.

The breakdown in governance means that natural resources are used less effectively, with land and water degradation leading to a lack of fodder for herders, lower farming yields, more frequent cattle epidemics and so on.[8] Likewise, water availability and quality are impacted by unsustainable practices and maladaptation – a process of adaptation to climate change that results in worse overall vulnerability, with, for example, farmers using fertiliser to cope with worsened growing prospects ending up degrading soil quality and polluting fishing rivers.[9]

Finally, the mining sector is the focus of frequent disputes, setting private mining companies against the local population and artisanal miners on the one hand and local workers against migrant miners on the other. The ensuing difficulties for people's livelihoods exacerbate vulnerabilities, foster resentment, incentivise illicit livelihoods as a coping mechanism, and even encourage recruitment by extremist or vigilante groups.

3   Gareyane, M. 'La sédentarisation des nomades dans la région de Gao. Révélateur et déterminant d'une crise multidimensionnelle au Nord Mali'. 2008. Available at: https://scd-resnum. univ-lyon3.fr/out/theses/2008_out_gareyane_m.pdf

4   International Crisis Group. "The Central Sahel: Scene of New Climate Wars?". 2020 Available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/b154-le-sahel-central-theatre-des-nouvelles-guerres-climatiques

5   Kabore, A. 'Brousse des uns, aire protégée des autres - Histoire du peuplement, perceptions de la nature et politique des aires protégées dans le Gourma burkinabè: l'exemple de la Réserve partielle de faune de Pama'. 2010 .Available at: https://www.adap.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Kabore_these_2010-1.pdf

6   UNHCR. "Note sur la situation actuelle dans la commune d'Inates-Tillabéri, Niger, août 2019". 2019. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/note-sur-la-situation-actuelle-dans-la-commune-d-inates-tillab-ri-niger-ao-t-2019

7   UNODC. Curriculum de formation à l'attention des écoles de formation judicaire et d'application à la loi: Lutte contre le terrorisme au Mali. 2018. Available at: https://pcjs-sahel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Mali-Curriculum-de-formation-jan-2018.pdf

8   The Liptako Gourma border zone is particularly affected by contagious bovine pleuropneumonia and pasteurellosis. Groupe de Travail Régional pour la Résilience du Système des Nations Unies en Afrique Centrale et de l'Ouest, Groupe de travail de Préparation et Réponse aux Urgences (EPR) et Unité Crises et Fragilité de l'OCDE. Analyse préliminaire des risques, des vulnérabilités et des actifs de résilience dans la région du Liptako-Gourma. 2019. Available at: https://www.food-security.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Liptako-Gourma-Diagnostic-27fev_FINAL.pdf

9   Nagarajan, C. et al. Weathering Risk climate, peace and security assessment: Mali. adelphi. 2022. Available at: https://weatheringrisk.org/sites/default/files/document/Climate%2C%20peace%20and%20security%20assessment%20Mali%20Full%20Report.pdf

1.2 Natural resources management for sustainable peace in Liptako Gourma

Given the close links between natural resource management and conflict in Liptako Gourma, there is a major opportunity for 'peace-positive' natural resource management to support wider peace and reconciliation in the region.

'Peace positive' natural resource management is an approach and practice that intentionally creates mechanisms to resolve grievances over the ownership or access to natural resources without resorting to violence. Such mechanisms explicitly centre peace in their design, ensuring they go beyond minimising negative impacts on conflict by deliberately promoting peaceful resolution of conflict and social cohesion.

In this context, peace-positive natural resource management can help to ensure:

1   The negotiated and progressive return of the state in areas where the local community
    is distrustful of their presence;

2   That disputes are mediated at a local level – including by customary/traditional authorities -
    and do not escalate to broader violent/armed confrontations;

3   That a more effective regulatory framework ensures that negative impacts of natural resource management
    projects on conflict are minimised, whereas the positive impacts on peace and stability are maximised;

4   That stakeholders are confident in the equity and transparency of processes
    of natural resource management; and,

5   That local mediation efforts are accompanied by concrete resource-related 'peace dividends', in terms of the
    benefits that local communities gain from a more peaceful context, such as safer access to land and water.
    These peace dividends can help to encourage stakeholders to adhere to the terms of mediated agreements.

Some peace-positive approaches are already implemented in the region, be they explicitly framed as peace positive or contributing to peace as an additional benefit. They shed some light on best practices to scale up and pitfalls to avoid.

Land

Several organisations are active in promoting more sustainable and inclusive management of land. In particular, Commissions Foncières (COFOs) assist communities in resolving land ownership issues in several localities across Liptako Gourma. In the communities where they are correctly functioning, they are a key vessel for harmonising centralised state law and customary legal frameworks. COFOs are supported by several organisations, from Association des Organisations Professionnelles Paysannes (AOPP, Mali) and the Initiative Malienne d'Appui au Développement Local (IMADEL, Mali) (establishing COFOs) to Observatoire National du Foncier (ONF, Burkina Faso) that supports the collective elaboration of Chartes Foncières (Land Charters). Other organisations such as Haute Autorité de la Consolidation de la Paix (HACP, Niger) build the capacities of judicial authorities and land users to appropriately apply land law,[10] and the capacities of land managers to prevent conflict by designing inclusive land use plans and using technologies for fair land management (ONF).[11]

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10 HACP (2023) Note Pratique L'expérience de la HACEP en matière d'approches environnementales de la paix : de l'« approche globale » de la paix aux « infrastructures de paix » et « accords sociaux » et le cas particulier de l'accord du 23 janvier 2023 à Banibangou, région de Tillabéry.
11 ONF (2023) Elaboration d'une charte foncière locale dans le cadre de lapréservation et de l'exploitation pacifique et harmonieuse des ressources naturelles.

Transhumance

Transboundary transhumance management is another important aspect of natural resource management in Liptako Gourma, with significant implications for stability for the wider region. Several organizations support this process, in particular, Réseau Bilital Maroobé (covering Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), which promotes the maintenance and preservation of transhumance routes as well as inclusive management of resources along those routes. The organisation Sahel Regional Council of Traditional and Customary Chieftaincies (CRCCT, Burkina Faso) focuses on resolving resource conflicts in the context of transhumance.[12] Other promising activities include the international coordination of "windows" in which herders can roam pastures freely, as well as the formalisation of transhumance corridors.

Water

Given the vulnerability of the region to drought and flooding, water governance is key to peace-positive natural resource management. An example of this is the management of the Sourou River plain in Mali and Burkina Faso:[13] In a bid to overcome the challenges of violence and fragmented governance in the Sourou River Plan in Mali, local authorities created the Inter collectivité du Sourou, encompassing 26 municipalities. The body simultaneously developed an Integrated and Sustainable Development Programme – defining concrete actions to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adaptively – as well as a comprehensive Strategic Environmental Assessment, which spoke to sustainable development issues. Both processes were designed inclusively, with a wide diversity of participants, including young people, women and the elderly, and representatives of all the different professions and sectors active at a communal level. A Comité Transfrontalier de Gestion Intégrée des Ressources en Eau du Bassin du Sourou was also created in 2012, to manage water resources among stakeholders in the Sourou Basin, promote and finance the development and restoration of such resources at the scale of the Sourou, foster synergy and cooperation with other water management bodies, provide input and advice on any projects being executed in the Basin. More than ten years later the arrangement is hailed as a success by both countries and by some organisations as an example of effective cooperation.

Mining

Women miners' organisations spearhead the fight against fraud and money laundering in Mali:[14] the Malian Federation of Women Miners (Femima) works with the national financial intelligence unit, and the national anti-terrorism prosecutor to establish a system for reporting suspicions of money laundering via the gold trade. Meanwhile, the Malian Association of Women Miners (Afemine) creates community contact points to raise money laundering alarms. Afemine is urging the creation of gold exchanges directly at artisanal and small-scale mining sites to better regulate the marketing of gold and stigmatise fraud and money laundering. Unfortunately, neither Afemine, Femima, nor the Malian authorities have the resources to physically visit these sites and exercise oversight.

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12 CRCCT (2023) Cas pratique de Gestion de Conflit pouvant servir de références pour la paix, la médiation, dans le cadre d'une Gouvernance environnementale
13 Molenaar, F. and Nooteboom, S. Improving decentralised natural resource management in the Sahel The case of the Sourou river plain in Mali. 2020. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep25682.pdf
14 OECD. 2018. Gold at the crossroads: Assessment of the supply chains of gold produced in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Available at: https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/Assessment-of-the-supply-chains-of-gold-produced-in-Burkina-Faso-Mali-Niger.pdf

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While there is not much evidence of concrete conservation efforts in the Ansongo-Ménaka (Mali) and Sahel (Burkina Faso) reserves - the latter described as only existing on paper by one author[15] - one effort that stands out is the community-based conservation of elephants in the Gourma reserve in Mali, promoted by the Mali Elephant Project, a consortium endeavour by the American WILD Foundation, the Kenyan based Save the Elephants and UK-based Environment and Development Group. Based on the understanding that economic and social factors encouraged haphazard natural resource usage and increased competition between humans and between communities and elephants, the project emphasised local ownership and grassroots solutions that regenerated ecosystems while improving livelihoods. This took the form of communal stigmatisation of poaching as "theft", as well as participatory forest protection, and community-based, restrained anti-poaching operations. As a result, more than 8,000,000 acres of habitat benefited from enhanced protection and restoration for over 250 elephants.
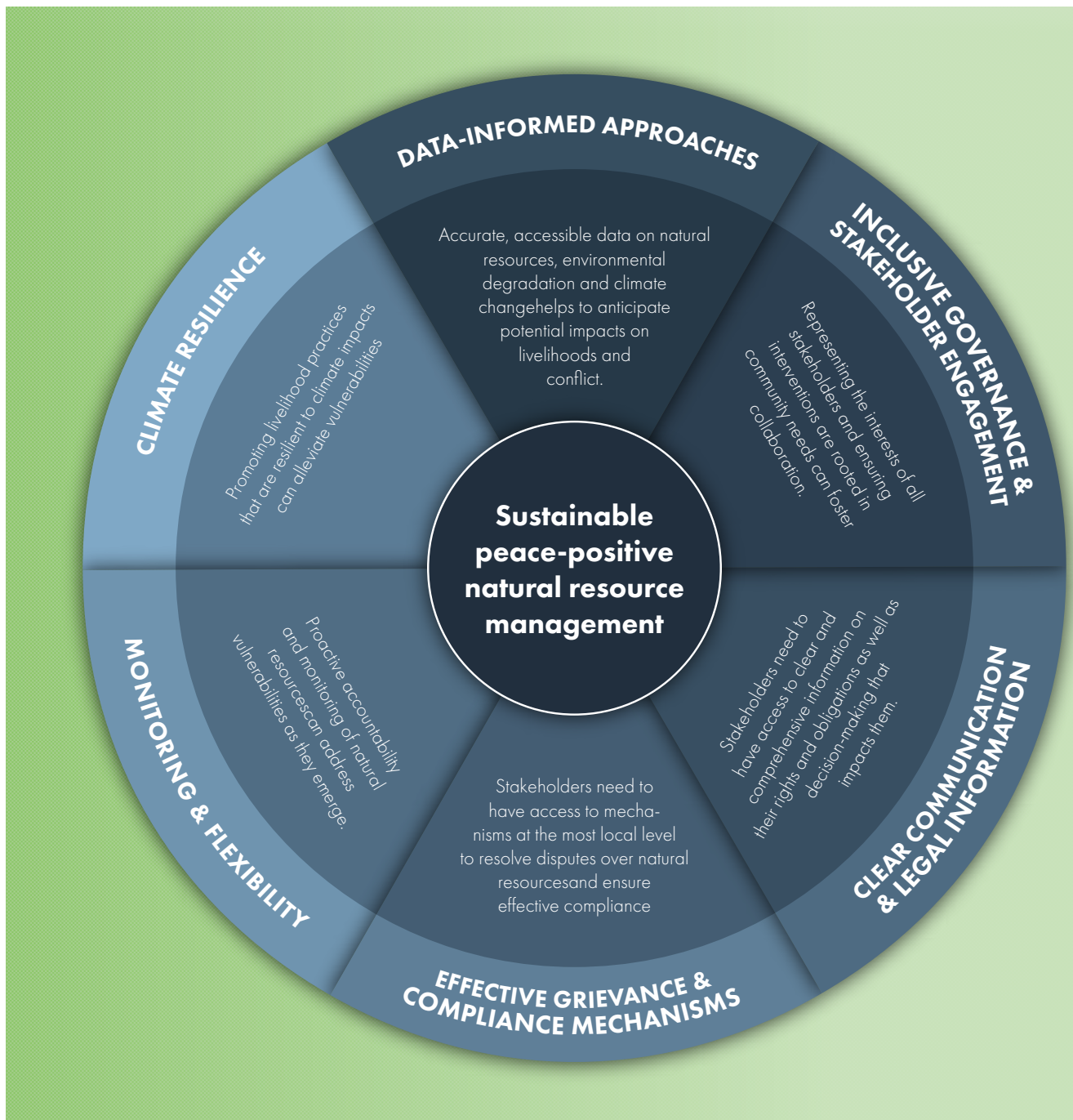

15 Kabore (2010)

2. Principles for peace-positive natural resource management

While peace-positive natural management initiatives are already yielding results in Liptako Gourma, there is significant potential to expand the approach. In doing so, the principles in the following infographic could help ensure durable contributions to sustainable peace in the region.

Sustainable peace-positive natural resource management

DATA-INFORMED APPROACHES
Accurate, accessible data on natural resources, environmental degradation and climate change helps to anticipate potential impacts on livelihoods and conflict.

INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
Representing the interests of all stakeholders and ensuring interventions are rooted in community needs can foster collaboration.

CLEAR COMMUNICATION & LEGAL INFORMATION
Stakeholders need to have access to clear and comprehensive information on their rights and obligations as well as decision-making that impacts them.

EFFECTIVE GRIEVANCE & COMPLIANCE MECHANISMS
Stakeholders need to have access to mechanisms at the most local level to resolve disputes over natural resources and ensure effective compliance

MONITORING & FLEXIBILITY
Proactive accountability and monitoring of natural resources can address vulnerabilities as they emerge.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE
Promoting livelihood practices that are resilient to climate impacts can alleviate vulnerabilities

3. Entry points for the peace-positive management of key natural resources

Despite the challenging circumstances in the region, there are entry points for governments, local communities and the international community in Liptako Gourma to implement these principles in practice.

3.1 **Data-informed approaches**	Data on environmental degradation and climate change helps actors to better understand how resources are likely to change, and anticipate potential impacts on livelihoods and conflict. For example, data can help with: • Informing reforms of the land tenure regime and transhumance routes, which require detailed knowledge of the resources and issues present and how they may evolve over the short- and long-term; • ITackling national and regional natural resource issues, which may range from cattle epidemics to deforestation and erosion; and, • IForecasting extreme weather events such as droughts and consequent restrictions on resource access, such as limiting water rights or cattle movement, from droughts to storms.

3.2 **Inclusive governance & stakeholder engagement**	Ensuring the interests of all stakeholders - especially the vulnerable and socially marginalised - can foster opportunities for collaborative and more effective management. Inclusive governance can be ensured by: • Including a wide range of stakeholders in reforms of land tenure regimes, water use systems and pastoral arrangements so that their interests, grievances and vulnerabilities are considered to prevent entrenching existing inequalities and compounding vulnerabilities; • Supporting COFOs and other communal natural resource management arrangements to include all the relevant stakeholders in their jurisdiction; • Designing new conservation agreements in an inclusive community-based manner to help promote local ownership, economic empowerment and anti-poaching that is accountable and respectful of human rights[1]; and, • Empowering communities to participate in natural resource management mechanisms such as community-based monitoring, early warning, and conservation initiatives.

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1   IISD. Conflict-Sensitive Conservation: Practitioners' Manual. 2009. Available at: https://www.iisd.org/publications/guide/conflict-sensitive-conservation-practitioners-manual

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3.3 Clear communications and legal information

Stakeholders need to have access to clear and comprehensive information on their rights and obligations as well as decision-making that impacts them.
This includes:
- Raising awareness of existing and new rights around the access to and use of natural resources, for example, through more effective, transparent and inclusive land rights recording and access to tenure information; and,
- Ensuring reform processes, from new boundaries to resource use arrangements, are clearly explained to stakeholders.

3.4 Effective grievance and compliance mechanisms

Stakeholders need to have access to mechanisms to resolve disputes and ensure compliance with rules effectively and peacefully.
Entry-points on this may include:
- Establishing or reinforcing mechanisms such as COFOs and transhumance committees to effectively address land disputes and grievances resulting from transhumance and other economic activities;
- Ensuring development projects impacting natural resources, including transboundary initiatives, are designed in a collaborative and participatory manner and have robust grievance mechanisms so they do not exacerbate local vulnerabilities and grievances or regional tensions;
- Ensuring that large mining companies comply with ESG standards and develop anti-corruption hotlines and other reporting mechanisms, and that their operations are conducted in a conflict-sensitive manner; and,
- Supporting the formalisation of the artisanal mining sector and promoting safety standards.

3.5 Monitoring and flexibility

Those leading NRM initiatives benefit from a robust understanding of the context and measures that proactively prevent violence and allow for accountability and monitoring to address vulnerabilities as they emerge.
This may entail:
- Designing interventions in a conflict-sensitive manner that is based on detailed knowledge of conflict actors and dynamics can help minimise negative and maximise positive impacts on conflict, peace, and stability; and,
- Using early warning systems to rapidly detect and resolve disputes or grievances around natural resources can prevent them from escalating into regional conflagrations.

3.6 Climate resilience

Promoting livelihood practices that are resilient to climate change can help alleviate some of the vulnerability they may suffer.
- Training resource users in climate-resilient agro-pastoral practices and water point management, such as traditional synergies between pastoralist and farming communities (fertilization of fields by cattle, provision of fodder...), with the additional advantage of increasing social cohesion; and,
- Carefully introduce novel practices and technologies such as agroecology, drought-resistant crops, and new transhumance routes.

4. Further reading

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The Do No Harm Framework and Other Tools for Practitioners of Land Activities.
https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Final_Conflict-Sensitivity-in-Land-Governance_March-30.pdf

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Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.
https://www.iisd.org/system/files/2022-09/illicit-financial-flows-conflict-artisanal-small-scale-gold-mining.pdf

Lyammouri, R. (2020). Mobility and conflict in Liptako-Gourma.
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le cas du Burkina Faso, du Mali et du Niger.
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https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/etude-devaluation-chaines-d-approvisionnement-en-or-au-burkina-faso-au-mali-et-au-niger.htm

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Quel avenir pour le pastoralisme face à l'insécurité et ses impacts ?
*https://www.maroobe.com/images/DOCS/Rapport%20Etude%20-Avenir%20du%20pastoralisme%20face%20%C3%A0%20
l'ins%C3%A9curit%C3%A9%20-RBM.pdf*

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