

When David faces Goliath:
SEXAGON's mission to build a smallholder sovereignty movement in rural Mali

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Executive Summary

“Across Africa and the developing world, a new global land rush is gobbling up large expanses of arable land. Despite their ageless traditions, stunned villagers are discovering that African governments typically own their land and have been leasing it, often at bargain prices, to private investors and foreign governments for decades to come.”¹

This “new global land rush” is certainly underway in Mali, but it is not without resistance. In the Office of the Niger, an economically poor, rice-growing region of central Mali, farmers are finding strength to resist land grabs through the leadership of SEXAGON (Union of Agricultural Workers of the Office of the Niger). The organization is both a union and much more: charged with the task of supporting small farmers, SEXAGON is creating the new social value of *smallholder sovereignty*, or the belief that subsistence farmers have the right to retain their land and farm in peace in order to support their families and escape the threat of worsening poverty. In the wake of land acquisitions that have threatened the lands and livelihoods of hundreds of families, SEXAGON is helping to fill the gap in political organizing that farmers have not yet been able to fill alone. The most dramatic of the acquisitions was an agreement that granted 100,000 hectares of currently inhabited land to the government of Libya, a move that has evicted families from their land, left many uncompensated, and has crippled their chances of lifting themselves out of poverty. This development void is where SEXAGON steps in, with a mission “to represent and assist farmers to defend their rights and interests, and to pursue improvement of their livelihoods.”² SEXAGON pursues this mission with a twofold strategy: 1) advocacy and political organization of farmers to ensure they receive public services and retain access to their land; and 2) improvement of the economic status of farmers through the formation of cooperative microcredit groups.³ Even with these courageous goals and its good standing in the community, SEXAGON faces a multitude of threats that could derail its progress and thwart its objectives. The organization suffers from the lack of a secure funding structure, needs to improve its organizational learning and knowledge transfer, requires capacity building, and needs to streamline and perfect its advocacy campaigns. SEXAGON currently has no internal mechanisms for measuring impact, and needs to both develop its own metrics and invite external auditors to study its efforts using pre-established metrics. All of these prerequisites for sustainable growth should be met before SEXAGON begins to scale up and/or out. SEXAGON has great potential to not only offer enduring solutions to the problem of agrarian poverty and lack of political representation, but also to become a leader in the smallholder sovereignty movement. SEXAGON will only achieve this standing, however, if it seeks accountability and rigor to improve current operations and look toward expansion.

¹ MacFarquhar, Neil. “African farmers displaced as investors move in.” *New York Times*, 21 Dec 2010. Web. 25 Feb 2011.

² Bureau d’Etudes et de Formation du Mali. “Etude des Conditions de Faisabilité et du Plan d’Affaires d’Une Cooperative Paysanne à Créer dans la Zone Office du Niger.” Magnambougou et Bamako. 2007.

³ Ibid

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I. Environmental Assessment

Background

Mali, a country on the edge of the Sahara in West Africa, is quickly becoming a crucible for controversy. As the national government approves multimillion-dollar land deals with foreign corporations, smallholder farmers are left landless and destitute, critics say. This phenomenon is far from new in the developing world, but some have posited that such acquisitions are part of “a new global land rush gobbling up large expanses of arable land”⁴ in Africa as never before.⁵ In Mali, the government has recently signed away farmland in several major agreements, the largest of which awarded 100,000 hectares to the government of Libya for a project called Malibya in 2009.⁶ Despite the fact that Malibya is a joint venture, how the needs of Malian farmers are being met by the project remains unclear.

A recent World Bank study says that major land acquisitions can positively impact poor countries, but it also reports that in their wake, some farmers have been displaced without compensation, lands have been undervalued and are lying fallow, and few jobs have been created.⁷ In Mali’s particular case, where 75% of the active population is involved in subsistence agriculture, the importance of appropriate agricultural policy that takes into account the needs of smallholder farmers cannot be underestimated.⁸ Opponents say that land takeovers violate local

⁴ MacFarquhar, Neil.

⁵ For a review of the literature on developing world land acquisitions and counter-efforts, see Appendix A.

⁶ Dia, C.A. “Office du Niger : LA RÉVOLUTION SE PRÉPARE.”
http://www.ma.gov.ml/voir_actu.aspx?lactu=38. May 4, 2010.

⁷ MacFarquhar, Neil.

⁸ Sangare, Tiémoko. “Mot du Ministre.” The Ministry of Agriculture of Mali.
http://www.ma.gov.ml/contenu_page.aspx?pa=26. 02 April 2011.

sovereignty and community values: one labor union insists, for instance, “that irrigable lands should be given first and foremost to Malian farmers producing food for domestic consumption, not to foreign firms and governments.”⁹ A handful of civil society groups have attempted to resist land deals that have led to farmer eviction, but their efforts, while earnest, have met with little success.

Opportunities and Challenges

Farmers in Mali have the advantage of partaking in not only the most common profession in their country, but they also represent the majority of the working population. Many farmers, and indeed entire rural communities, are socially active in voluntary professional organizations. They also benefit from wide social approval, a vital element in building an enduring social and political movement.¹⁰ The traditional leadership and organizing structures of villages in rural Mali lend themselves to regular assembly,¹¹ which are important opportunities on which farmers seeking improved organization can capitalize.

Despite a social climate that is favorable to agricultural workers and supports their efforts to secure economic gain and social benefit, Malian farmers face a host of challenges that could derail even their best-laid plans. Poverty itself – and especially its cyclical, intergenerational nature in Mali – is perhaps the most crippling challenge small farmers face. For example, an extreme lack of economic resources, including little to no access to credit, agricultural inputs or other

⁹ Kerksen, Tanya. “Don’t touch my land! - Peasant Resistance to land grabs in Mali.” *Food Sovereignty Tours*. Food First, 05 Mar 2011. Web. 3 Apr 2011. <<http://www.foodsovereigntytours.org/2011/03/west-africa-report-part-i-don%E2%80%99t-touch-my-land-peasant-resistance-to-land-grabs-in-mali/>>.

¹⁰ Jansen, J. From guild to rotary: Hunters' associations and Mali's search for a civil society. *International Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IRSH)*, 10(1017). 2008.

¹¹ Ibid

supplies, and the inability to access alternative funding channels, inhibits farmer success. Political disorganization, confusing political messaging, and the challenges of organizing in an environment with lackluster communication channels also put farmers at a disadvantage. Extremely low literacy levels, which are the lowest in rural communities, exacerbate all of these challenges, further preventing farmers from advocating for themselves and effectively sharing their message.

Other, more minor challenges include lack of free time in farming communities during planting and harvesting seasons, and transportation issues. Amidst these challenges, a basic lack of transparency about agricultural policy and the increasingly large role of foreign governments and corporations in Malian agriculture only add to farmers' confusion and disorganization. Women face even greater impediments to political activity caused by their incredible number of household tasks and childrearing responsibilities, severe lack of access to capital, and lower levels of literacy and education.

Oster's Six Forces Analysis

Current organizations

There are only a handful of organizations working specifically to increase the political organization of farmers, and fewer still seeking to improve their livelihoods by providing funding in the form of small credits. The CNOP (National Coordination of Peasant Farmer Organizations) is one organization doing work in this realm, seeking to build a long-term, credible peasant farmer movement. As an umbrella organization, it is charged with bringing together the dozens of small farming groups and civic organizations in Mali through the socio-economic development of

smallholders' farms and increased political representation of small farmers. Goals of the CNOP include becoming the primary interlocutor between the state/development actors and farmers' groups, clarifying and strengthening the roles of state actors on agricultural policy, increasing and improving information flows and knowledge-sharing, mediating debates, and leading efforts to ensure long-term sustainability and food sovereignty. Since the CNOP works across the entire country, its ability to delve deeply into local problems can be limited.

The AAOP (Association of Peasant Farmer Organizations) is a sub-group of the CNOP, which has a more limited focus and scope of activity. SEXAGON, the Union of Agricultural Workers of the Office of the Niger,¹² is a member organization under the CNOP umbrella, which is virtually the only group within this particular niche and is the preeminent organization representing agrarian communities in Mali. SEXAGON shares the vision and values of the CNOP, but operates exclusively in the Office of the Niger region. The SEXAGON meets regularly with and enjoys a good relationship with both the CNOP and the AOPP.¹³ All three organizations count themselves members of the Via Campesina alliance, a network of actors working to protect the rights of small family farmers in developing countries worldwide.

It must be noted that there are several other organizations offering microcredit to smallholders in Mali, including USAID, Oxfam, The Mali Initiative, ICCO, and Islamic Relief, but CNOP, AOPP and SEXAGON are the only homegrown organizations working on these issues. They are also the only organizations working

¹² The French acronym stands for Syndicat des Exploitants Agricoles de l'Office du Niger.

¹³ Bell, Emily. "The rice farmer vs. the multinational: Mali's winding path toward food sovereignty." In partial fulfillment of *SIT Mali: Health, Gender, and Community Empowerment*, Spring 2010. (11 May 2010).

in the unique combined niche of microfinance *and* community organizing. These organizations are run and led by Malian farmers and do not employ foreign contractors, and are thus uniquely in touch with their communities and their work at the grassroots level.

Ease of entering opportunity/need niche

Entering this niche on a grassroots level is relatively difficult and requires a high level of familiarity with local culture and norms, as evidenced by the fact that the CNOP and its member organizations are currently the only ones with the mission of political *and* economic empowerment of small farmers. The CNOP has created a sort of “opt-in or opt-out” environment, meaning that since there are not alternative professional organizations, there is little incentive for participants to opt out of membership, other than the choice of non-association in general.

Substitute activities/actors

The CNOP does face competition, however, from other NGOs charged with improving the livelihoods of small farmers through non-political means; see, for example, the US’ Millennium Challenge Corporation and several projects funded by USAID and the World Bank,¹⁴ and the other international organizations mentioned above. These organizations are unquestionably wealthier and more politically powerful than their local grassroots counterparts (see Appendix D for a pictorial illustration of this power dynamic). However, they are neither a direct substitute nor are they in direct competition with activities led by CNOP partners because their

¹⁴ GRAIN. "Turning African farmland over to big business: ." *GRAIN*. N.p., 04 Apr 2010. Web. 5 Apr 2011. <<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=679>>.

political philosophies, leadership structures, and ultimate goals are patently different. It must be noted that SEXAGON, AAOP, and CNOP all operate with political orientations and organizational philosophies that are highly oppositional to the neoliberal development paradigms espoused by major players like USAID and the World Bank.¹⁵ Thus, their strategies and vision are not direct substitutes.

SEXAGON's clients

As of 2009, SEXAGON's clients were approximately 12,500 small farmers that counted themselves "members" of its cooperative-style labor union.¹⁶ The majority of SEXAGON's clients are rice farmers (rice farming is the most prominent profession in the region), but the union does include a small number of cattle herders and market gardeners.¹⁷

Suppliers

Since SEXAGON is focused on creating both social and economic value, its suppliers are diverse. Loosely interpreted, the leadership of the organization and the members themselves are all "suppliers," driving the social value of political organization, land retention, and advocacy. The role and identities of suppliers of capital for investment in community cooperatives are currently unknown.

¹⁵ GRAIN

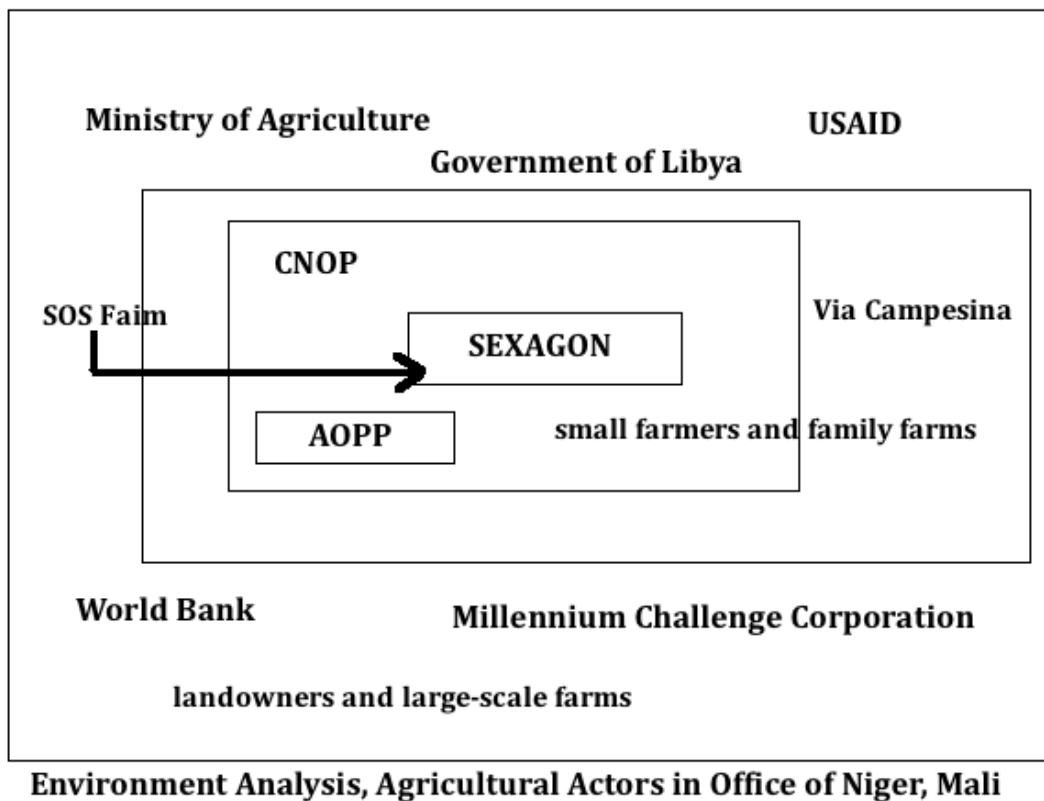
¹⁶ Bell, Emily.

¹⁷ Laurent, Luc. "Sexagon (Syndicat des Exploitants Agricoles de l'Office du Niger)." SOS Faim - Action pour le developpement. SOS Faim, 11 Nov 2009. Web. 3 Apr 2011.
<http://www.sosfaim.org/pages_lu/Sexagon?lang=fr>.

Current donors

SEXAGON's only donor that is profiled in the media is partner organization SOS Faim, a French hunger relief agency that has issued small grants to SEXAGON on an as-needed basis.¹⁸ There is currently no other information publicly available about SEXAGON's donors and their level of commitment.

Below is a pictorial summary of the Environment Analysis:



¹⁸ "Faliry Boly, secrétaire général de la fédération des coopératives du Sexagon." *SOS Faim*. Web. 10 Apr 2011. <http://www.sosfaim.be/agriculture-alimentation-FR-multimedia-videos-faliry_boly.htm>.

II. Organizational Structure and Strategy

Overview

SEXAGON was created in Niono, a town outside of Ségou, in 1996 to defend the interests of peasant farmers in the Office of the Niger who realized their need for improved representation in order to resist what they perceived as abusive and harmful state agricultural policies.¹⁹ (See Appendix B for a map of the region covered by SEXAGON.) SEXAGON remains the largest and most active union in the Office of the Niger,²⁰ and operates in five administrative zones^{21,22}

In the wake of projects like Malibya that have negatively impacted farming communities, SEXAGON seeks to promote the crucial social value of giving voice to the grievances of small farmers by increasing their political representation and organizing power in order to prevent their interests from being neglected.²³ The mission of SEXAGON, as stated by Secretary-General Faliiry Boly, is “to represent and assist farmers to defend their rights and interests, and to pursue improvement of their livelihoods.”²⁴ From this initial articulation of its mission, we grasp that SEXAGON’s activities are political in nature, socially focused, and directly concerned with the protection and improvement of the lives and livelihoods of smallholders.

To achieve its mission, SEXAGON is engaged in two distinct approaches: 1) advocacy and political organization of farmers to ensure they receive public services and retain access to their land; and 2) improvement of the economic status of

¹⁹ Laurent, Luc.

²⁰ Bureau d’Etudes et de Formation du Mali.

²¹ The zones are Niono, Molodo, N’débougou, Kouroumari, and Macina.

²² Bell, Emily.

²³ “Faliiry Boly...”

²⁴ Ibid

farmers through the formation of cooperative microcredit groups.²⁵ (For a diagram of the value chain of SEXAGON's strategies, see Appendix C.) When moving beyond this mission statement and articulation of primary activities, the information available about SEXAGON's organizational structure and culture becomes scarce. To date, SEXAGON's work has not been covered in the scholarly literature, and the organization does not have a website.

The Office of the Niger was created in 1932 by the French colonial government in the Niger River delta. It was intended to irrigate 1,000,000 hectares of land to produce cotton to be exported to France.²⁶ Today, the Office of the Niger is still used for farming. With the authorization of the Malibya plan, approximately 10% of the land controlled by the Office of Niger was granted to Libya for development, and numerous farming families were not alerted and were swiftly evicted from their land.²⁷ In some cases, farmers were also not adequately compensated for their losses.²⁸ Since the deal was signed, and even though it was in the name of development, SEXAGON has continued to articulate another vision.²⁹

Culture analysis

SEXAGON was born when villagers realized their desire to resist abusive and harmful agricultural policies. The reasons and motivations for this founding have long fostered in SEXAGON a culture of questioning and resistance to state policies and popular foreign donor development strategies. Members are encouraged to

²⁵ Bureau d'Etudes et de Formation du Mali.

²⁶ Bell, Emily.

²⁷ Precise data on evicted rural residents is not available; see Bell, 2010.

²⁸ Bell, Emily.

²⁹ "Faliry Boly..."

resist land takeovers, and independently managed cooperatives allow members to take ownership of their problems.³⁰ In short, due to the circumstances that motivated SEXAGON's initial creation and vision-casting, a culture of dissent and an attitude of prudent questioning of the status quo among both staff and members shapes SEXAGON's activities and identity. SEXAGON's organizational culture contributes to the advancement of its objectives by embracing the broader Malian values of unity and solidarity, which it reflects by relying on consensus in decision-making, involving entire communities in its work, and insisting upon the importance of the advancement of the whole community rather than individual members.³¹

Innovation diffusion/communication strategy plan

SEXAGON, rather than marketing a particular product or service, is “selling” a multifaceted social value, which includes the following: small family farms are the core of Malian culture and society; farmers are deserving of rights and protections and should maintain their own lands; and finally, improved commercialization techniques and economic empowerment are the economic means to achieving these ends.^{32, 33} Their mission is inherently political in nature, as it seeks to empower “farmer-activists” to realign the power relationship between the Malian government, its citizens, and their lands by giving voice to the grievances of farming communities.³⁴

³⁰ Bureau d'Etudes et de Formation du Mali.

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ Bell, Emily

³⁴ “Faliry Boly...”

SEXAGON does not have an explicitly stated communication strategy, which could be a major source of organizational weakness. Members and leaders rely primarily on word of mouth and an extensive network of personal relationships to transmit the SEXAGON message. This form of communication, while common, culturally appropriate and generally effective in Mali, limits the size of the intended audience that can be reached, and thus limits the participation of a broader audience. The Secretary-General of SEXAGON, Faliiry Boly, is an articulate speaker and presenter, and is the main interlocutor between SEXAGON and the general public, both in Mali and other countries.³⁵ Boly attends international conferences to improve his understanding of new developments in smallholder political organization, commercialization, and economic empowerment, and then transmits lessons learned back to SEXAGON.³⁶

Kellogg's Theory of Change Logic Analysis

(See Appendix E for a diagram of the Kellogg's Theory of Change Logic Analysis)

Problem or Issue

Family farms in the Office of the Niger region are vulnerable to failure due to changing environmental and social conditions, including poor rainfall, systemic poverty and a lack of consistent access to capital for agricultural investment. Exacerbating these problems is the looming possibility of seizure from foreign corporations as a result of land acquisition agreements, in addition to price distortions of rice and other crops on the market due to an uneven international trade playing field. As farmers suffer from a lack of political organization and

³⁵ Bell, Emily

³⁶ Ibid

advocacy on their behalf, unless the power dynamic changes, the security of their farms – and indeed, their entire livelihoods – will be threatened as never before.

Community Assets/Needs

Farmers in the region served by SEXAGON have a great number of assets, which include the following:

- The solidarity of small communities;
- A cultural legacy of assembly and organization;
- The strength found in numbers and shared goals;
- The support and involvement of labor unions like SEXAGON and the CNOP;
- Cultural emphasis on interpersonal and inter-clan relationships; and
- Political will for positive change and community development.

Despite these assets, the needs of poor farmers who are vulnerable to land seizure remain great. Aside from the numerous constraints placed on them by poverty, farmers need:

- Access to long-term credit for agricultural inputs and investment;
- Literacy and improved communication channels;
- A clear, streamlined message;
- Skills training for commercialization and market-readiness of products; and
- Coherent, commonly agreed-upon goals.

Desired Results

Outputs: Immediate results of SEXAGON's work will allow farmers to retain their ancestral land by putting an end to manipulative land seizures by foreign

entities. Restoration of land to farmers who have been inadequately compensated is SEXAGON's second short-term goal. SEXAGON also expects to equip an increasing number of member cooperatives with small credits to improve their agricultural yields and the market value of their products.

Outcomes: As SEXAGON moves to the middle- and long-term of its work, the organization expects to continue its work of equipping cooperative groups with small credits, and plans to move several of the groups toward complete self-sufficiency in terms of funding. At the national level, SEXAGON wants to press the national government to create and enforce laws and land codes that will protect small farms, and expects land seizures to have ended.

Impacts: The long-term vision of SEXAGON includes growing and supporting a powerful, equitable union of smallholder farmers able to stand up for their own rights and interests in the face of future threats to their land and ability to participate in the market. As SEXAGON grows in both size and legitimacy, it expects community cooperatives to also remain economically viable and sustainable in the long term, with training programs in place to empower members to practice good stewardship of their credits. SEXAGON seeks the final impact of making smallholder family farms less dependent on international aid and relief programs, and more able to independently participate in the national economy.

Influential Factors

There are a multitude of factors that could serve to either strengthen or derail the progress made by SEXAGON on behalf of smallholders. Influencers in the need niche of smallholder producer sovereignty in rural Mali include everything

from market prices to rainfall conditions, and the current political climate to projects from international donor agencies. Actors and activities that could more specifically influence the work of SEXAGON include: competing (though usually partner) organizations like the CNOP and AOPP, or any other new union organizations that enter the field; international organizations and large donor programs; a changing presidency or local administration; the continued process of decentralization and its fiscal implications in the Office of the Niger; and also the willingness (or unwillingness) of multinational corporations to invest in Malian agriculture on a large scale. Only time will tell which of these influencers will become relevant, and indeed, either beneficial or detrimental to SEXAGON's work.

Strategies

SEXAGON relies on a twofold strategy to achieve its vision of supporting smallholder family farmers in their pursuit of improved livelihoods. The first half of this strategy is giving voice to union members by increasing their political representation and organizing power. The second is to improve the conditions under which smallholders farm by granting cooperative groups small credits to broaden their access to inputs, improve the quality of their products, and expand their enterprises. SEXAGON's strategy has enormous potential for impact because it is a fairly young and vigorous organization, has strong interpersonal relationships, and is quickly gaining the attention and support of international agriculture advocacy organizations/alliances including SOS Faim, GRAIN, and the Via

Campesina alliance.³⁷ The leadership of SEXAGON is also exploring legal intervention³⁸ and the “big idea” of the importance of the rule of law for the support of the poor in the developing world, which has begun to gain traction in the scholarly literature.³⁹ Since, as previously mentioned, scholarly work is severely lacking, SEXAGON has determined these to be the most effective available strategies through anecdotal evidence, personal experience in the field, and also through the completion of independent research and crowd-sourcing of its target audience.⁴⁰

Assumptions

All of the work being done by SEXAGON assumes that smallholder family farmers in the Office of the Niger are struggling to support themselves financially and are in need of economic empowerment. SEXAGON also assumes that said farmers suffer from political paralysis and an inability to have their voices heard. By leading its activities, SEXAGON assumes that there is a need for an interlocutor between the state and small farmers, and that their rights and interests are not being adequately upheld at present. Other underlying assumptions include the belief that development is sustainable when it is participatory, cooperative, and features the leadership of the local community; large international donor agencies do not necessarily have the best interests of the poor at heart; and microcredit offers

³⁷ Bell, Emily.

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Boutros, Victor, and Gary Haugen. "And Justice for All: Enforcing Human Rights for the World's Poor ." *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2010) Web. 14 Apr 2011. <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66210/gary-haugen-and-victor-boutros/and-justice-for-all>>.

⁴⁰ Bureau d'Etudes et de Formation du Mali

potential to lift the poor out of poverty without undermining their culture and traditions.⁴¹

Measuring Impact and Accountability

Unfortunately, no measures or metrics are currently being developed or used by SEXAGON to analyze the impact it may be having on its clients or target population. The only specific information available on SEXAGON's microcredit activities is found in a single paragraph, written in 2010:

“...It took seven years to organize the cooperatives...Now there are 70 cooperatives set in place with 48 that are working successfully, i.e. paying back 100% of their credit. Some groups do not have the money to pay back the credit, while others simply do not understand the concept of credit, i.e. giving money back that was given to you.”⁴²

Analysis reveals that the organization currently shows a serious dearth of both quantitative and qualitative data. SEXAGON shows no use of external benchmarks and does not indicate whom its shareholders are – or if they are included in decision-making – which would make any potential for dialogue about accountability impossible. As a labor union, SEXAGON should be keeping extensive notes on its members and activities.

Secretary-General Boly admits that in the Malian context, bookkeeping remains a foreign concept and is out of sync with local culture, which has for centuries relied on oral communication as the primary form of information transfer. Indeed, Bambara, the local language spoken by 80% of the Malian population, was not even recorded in a standardized written fashion until 1966. In this environment,

⁴¹ Bell, Emily

⁴² Ibid

Boly has struggled to incorporate note-taking and data collection into his staff's activities, and after much convincing, "people are starting to understand that, for example, putting things in writing makes it more official—it makes people listen to you and believe in what you are saying."⁴³ That said, the organization does not incorporate regular data collection, nor does it issue an Annual Report. Despite anecdotal evidence and select media reports that indicate SEXAGON is highly active, potentially successful, and well-connected in the field, literally no data exist with which its work can be analyzed.

This is a distressing reality, as it means that SEXAGON is currently accountable to no one, and follows no publicly available standards or set protocol. In a region of the world that is infamous for its corruption and lack of transparency, this organization must strive to do better than the norm. If no data exist on programs, performance, or outcomes, then measuring impact – and thereby rising to the challenge of attracting donors – will remain an elusive goal. In addition to developing impact and activity measures, SEXAGON should also generate data about its internal processes and capacity measures. In order to attract donors and become more competitive, SEXAGON should move toward calculating its social return on investment (SROI), or in other words, create a metric that would showcase both its enterprise value and social purpose value.

Scaling Up/Out Analysis

At its current level of operation, completely lacking in specific data and external analysis, SEXAGON is nowhere near prepared to scale either up or out. As

⁴³ Bell, Emily.

stated above, SEXAGON simply does not have the capacity or necessary experience to expand or broaden its scope of work, and any analysis of scaling up and/or out possibilities would be not only theoretical, but also hyperbolic at this stage. In the recommendations that follow, in lieu of an analysis of how the organization might scale up or scale out its activities and mission, this case study will continue to focus on how SEXAGON can scale its activities to actually *define and meet the goals it has already set* in its broadly-outlined mission and mandate.

III. Recommendations

Spread the message

First and foremost, in order to promote and spread awareness of its mission, SEXAGON Mali needs to clearly define the intended audience for its message. Currently, as seen in the literature available, the main recipients of SEXAGON's smallholder sovereignty message are the farmers themselves; because the organization does not have a website, is not frequently profiled in the media, and is not covered in the academic literature, those not directly involved in the work are unlikely to be aware of SEXAGON's activities. SEXAGON's most obvious barrier to successful social entrepreneurship is their lack of readily available information. The organization would benefit from creating a website as soon as possible, which would allow members to participate in an exchange of ideas across space and time, and other interested parties (and potential donors) to get involved and updated.

SEXAGON would also do well to tap into the exponentially increasing number of cell phone users in rural Mali. Setting up a network of connected cell phone users

would enable members of lending cooperatives to better facilitate meetings, easily alert one another of problems, and importantly, to convene protests and other advocacy events which depend on a time-sensitive response to succeed. SEXAGON should also complete a “communication audit” to determine whether and how to tailor and intensify their message locally and/or internationally after determining which audience’s attention would be more valuable to meeting the long-term goals of the organization.

A third way through which SEXAGON could spread its message to potential members of cooperatives and future leaders of the organization is by airing short spots on local radio programs. Efforts undertaken by advocates of community health programs that shared simple health and sanitation messages have been wildly successful in West Africa, and if done well, could be similarly effective in reaching farmers with the message of the importance of self-sufficiency and appropriate agricultural investment. Using radio to broadcast the SEXAGON message would uniquely reach the non-literate population of Mali, which is a significant majority of smallholder farmers.

Build capacity

Though SEXAGON does have numbers on its side in terms of the sheer volume of small farmers in Mali that would likely be willing to join its cause, and though membership is currently somewhere between 12,000 and 13,000 members, capacity-building remains an important and worthy recommendation for organizational improvement. In the process of building capacity through recruiting more participants, including the most visibly necessary leaders and public

communicators, the organization will be strengthened. Adding new talent and energy to the organization will also serve to streamline leadership roles and clarify member responsibilities, which would lead to greater efficacy and efficiency. Accordingly, a stronger, more efficient and well-organized SEXAGON will be not only capable of setting and achieving more aggressive goals, but will have the potential to stay competitive in its particular niche. Last, capacity building will ultimately build within SEXAGON a stronger culture of growth, drawing participating members to recruit more participants and spread the message.

Secure sustainable resources

Before continuing with its microcredit initiatives, SEXAGON needs to find demonstrable evidence that microfinance can be feasible and successful in Mali. Once it has determined that microcredit is a worthy and feasible activity for it to pursue, the organization must then come up with a sound financial plan and reporting mechanism, as described in the “Measuring Impact and Accountability” section above.

Even a brief look at SEXAGON’s current funding structure reveals major weaknesses. At present, its small-scale partners, including its main international partner SOS Faim, are providing the capital necessary for both day-to-day operations and small credits to farming cooperative groups. SEXAGON does not currently seem to have a long-term funding strategy in place, nor does it have short-term funding targets available to the public.⁴⁴ Though SEXAGON has relatively low

⁴⁴ While precise numbers may in fact exist, after rigorous study the author has found them unavailable to the public in any organized fashion.

operating costs, if the core of its mission is built upon economic empowerment through microcredit, then securing more sustainable funding channels should be an urgent and pressing goal for the organization. In order to develop a reliable funding strategy, Secretary-General Boly might consider bringing in an external consultant, or working with funding experts to discern the organization's exact assets, needs and goals. SEXAGON must find long-term creditors willing to lend to its high-risk venture of supporting small farmers through community credits, which is a lending environment that remains little trusted by donors considering investment in West Africa. SEXAGON must first demonstrate to potential donors that it is worthy of both monetary and time investment, and then should move immediately to securing funding. Other funding schemes, including collecting small membership dues from participants or soliciting financial assistance from the Ministry of Agriculture or international partners, are also possible, but SEXAGON should first complete a rigorous analysis of all of its funding options to determine which strategy will be most effective and sustainable in the long-term.

Lead effective advocacy campaigns

In the past, SEXAGON has staged multiple direct action efforts in an attempt to help its members retain their land in the face of seizures and takeover; unfortunately, none of the protests were successful, and in all cases, families were ultimately driven from the land they had lived on and farmed for generations. SEXAGON would do well to learn from its past mistakes and become a stronger, better-organized leader of direct action efforts first by determining which advocacy and action efforts will be most effective in the Malian context. After careful

strategizing and planning, SEXAGON should again execute protests when it is socially and culturally appropriate and when farmers face imminent eviction. One facet of a successful direct action strategy should include the involvement of the entire community in resistance to land takeovers, which has proven to be a successful tactic in agrarian sovereignty movements in other countries.⁴⁵ Boly has voiced the desire to collaborate with legal scholars who could assist farmers to learn their legal rights and protections, and who could also encourage local courts and presiding religious leaders to uphold traditional land tenancy and ownership schemes.⁴⁶ He should continue to pursue how both traditional/religious and modern law in Mali might be able to add vigor to the cause and strategies of SEXAGON farmers.

Share knowledge

Once SEXAGON has secured sustainable funding channels, has a strategy in place for effective communication of its message and mission to the public, has built up capacity and has led more effective advocacy campaigns, the leadership of the organization can then work more specifically to improve knowledge and skills transfer. Transfer of knowledge, both inside and outside of the organization, will be crucial if SEXAGON aims to continue and expand its work, and perhaps replicate it in other regions of Mali or even other countries.

Microcredit as an antidote to rural poverty remains a new concept in West Africa, and has rarely been tried – and perhaps never succeeded – in Mali. Secretary-

⁴⁵ GRAIN.

⁴⁶ Bell, Emily.

General Boly says there must be a change in mentality of rice farmers, who continue to have difficulty understanding and putting in to practice the concepts of interest and repayment of loans.⁴⁷ This “change in mentality” can certainly be achieved through skills training seminars and close, dedicated work. Key goals in the facilitation of knowledge transfer should include efforts to improve member literacy and communication skills, the incorporation of Bambara-language materials, tailoring future knowledge-sharing campaigns to a non-literate audience and welcoming scholarly analysis and critique of methods. It must be noted, too, that SEXAGON should strive to strike a balance with the transfer of knowledge both inside and outside of the organization itself. If SEXAGON achieves long-term success and meets its goals, the organization could then pursue how it might transfer its organizational and topical knowledge to other organizations in a more formalized way, potentially through formal training seminars or consultancy.

⁴⁷ Bell, Emily.

IV. Business Plan

Executive Summary

Imagine you are a farmer on a medium-sized farm in the United States. It is September, and you have just finished harvesting your last row of corn. You shut off your tractor, and as the noise dies down, you look over the fields you inherited from your grandfather with satisfaction. You wave goodbye to your day workers, and head inside to greet your wife and children, sitting down to enjoy a hearty meal.

Now imagine you are a farmer in Mali, West Africa. You return home from a trying day of harvest, your body weak from exhaustion after laboring under the hot sun and sore from gripping your weathered scythe, your only tool. Your wife greets you at the door, a pained look on her face, telling you that your neighbors have just lost their land to a foreign company that moved in, handed them a small wad of cash, and sent them away. You look to the corner of the house where you store your food, grateful that there is still some millet from the harvest. At least for today, anyway.



Tyler Hicks/The New York Times

This second scenario is the story of the typical Malian farmer. 75% of the Malian population are subsistence farmers, and most do not own their land. In the Office of the Niger in central Mali, hundreds of farming families are losing their land to foreign takeovers. They are left landless and destitute, without the farms that once supplied their food and only source of income and security. Now, they face insurmountable odds of overcoming poverty.

SEXAGON, the Union of Agricultural Workers of the Office of the Niger, represents a compelling and dynamic answer to this complicated problem. This labor union is a

cooperative of over 12,000 family farmers who are seeking both social and economic empowerment through an innovative and unique set of strategies. By improving the political representation for its member farmers and by coordinating microcredit dispersion to community cooperatives, SEXAGON is helping family farmers retain their land and improve their families' livelihoods for generations to come.

The Opportunity

The work of SEXAGON is compelling because of its grassroots nature, its sensitivity to the needs of the poorest of the poor in rural Mali, and the urgency with which it operates. SEXAGON is a capable local leader in the fight against rural poverty and landlessness. To strengthen its impact as an organization, SEXAGON requires the following:

- Access to long-term, low interest credits for its cooperative member groups
- Strong working relationships with donors and foundations
- Funding for public relations campaigns and national advocacy initiatives
- Assistance in developing sound metrics, scholarly analysis, and assessment of impact measures



Emily Bell, 2010

The SE Organization and its Services and Strategy

SEXAGON's mission is "to represent and assist farmers to defend their rights and interests, and to pursue improvement of their livelihoods."⁴⁸

SEXAGON pursues this mission with a twofold strategy:

- 1) Advocacy and political organization of farmers to ensure they receive public services and retain access to their land; and**
- 2) Improvement of the economic status of farmers through the formation of cooperative microcredit groups**⁴⁹

In the pursuit of this strategy, SEXAGON undertakes the following:

- **Coordinating** meetings with the cooperative groups and dispersing credit from donors and partner organizations;
- **Organizing** direct action campaigns and advocacy events to give voice to farmers grievances;
- **Seeking** the help of partners, field contacts and other experts to assist small farmers to retain control and practice good stewardship of their lands⁵⁰

SEXAGON's long-term vision is to see farmers

- *Continue to participate in a credible smallholder sovereignty movement;*
- *Own and farm their own lands;*
- *Increase their productivity and profits; and*
- *Eliminate their dependence on foreign aid and development programs*⁵¹

SEXAGON is unlike any other organization in its field because it combines the *social value* of grassroots organization with the *economic value* of microcredit in the Office of the Niger region. SEXAGON sets itself apart from other actors by making the crucial linkages between social, political, and economic empowerment of smallholders.

SEXAGON's potential for future growth in its microcredit enterprise will only be limited by its ability to secure dynamic donors, develop useful and reliable metrics for assessing impact, and captivately and effectively communicate its message.

⁴⁸ Bell, Emily.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Bureau d'Etudes and de Formation du Mali

⁵¹ "Faliry Boly..."

The Management Team and Board of Directors⁵²



advocate on their behalf.⁵³

Faliiry Boly is the Secretary-General of SEXAGON, and also sits on the Board. Boly, having begun his career as a small farmer, is the also the public voice of SEXAGON and the interlocutor between the organization and the government of Mali, partner organizations, and competitors. Having started as a farmer himself, Boly is uniquely in touch with the needs of smallholders, and is acutely aware of the problems they face, which enables him to serve as a strong and capable



her groundbreaking organizing strategies, particularly regarding the integration of women, with SEXAGON's leadership and cooperative groups.

Wangari Maathi is a Nobel Peace Prize winner recognized for her achievement in empowering the women of Kenya to heal their land through community tree planting efforts, rooting out corruption and stimulating peaceful dialogue. She was also the first environmentalist to receive a Nobel Peace Prize. As the founder of the Kenyan Green Belt Movement, Ms. Maathi is a leader in the global movement for environmental justice in the developing world. Her role on the Board allows her to share



Ministry of Agriculture and international agricultural organizations.

Ibrahima Coulibaly is the President of the CNOP (National Coordination of Peasant Farmer Organizations). The CNOP is the largest agricultural union in Mali, and Mr. Coulibaly has many years of expertise coordinating and sustaining smallholder sovereignty movements, and started his career as a small farmer. He is in regular communication with the



diversify its networks, and he also provides direct support to community cooperatives in the decision-making stage of their credit portfolio development.

Michel Partiot is the Regional Director of CIRAD (Agricultural Research for Development) for Continental West Africa. Mr. Partiot helps SEXAGON tap into the extensive network of research CIRAD provides its stakeholders on land management, sustainable agriculture and improving the efficiency of small-scale farming systems. Mr. Partiot allows the organization to grow and

⁵² SEXAGON does not currently have any information available about its Board; these are my recommendations.

⁵³ "Faliiry Boly..."



Modibo Coulibaly is the National Director of SIT (School for International Training) in Bamako, Mali. Coulibaly oversees American foreign exchange students who study abroad in Mali. Mr. Coulibaly has served as a professor both in Mali and the United States for over 30 years, and is well connected to universities in both countries. He possesses the ability to facilitate interdisciplinary partnerships with foreign and domestic universities, visiting scholars, and students who will enable SEXAGON to streamline and perfect its financial and operational auditing and assessment.

Operating Plan

SEXAGON uses its marketing strategy and long-term goals to support its day-to-day operations, which focus on two main areas:

→ **Organizing direct-action campaigns**, which includes: engaging in advocacy at the national level, political activity, and petition of power actors; and pursuing the intervention of lawyers and legal scholars to secure legal protection of smallholders

Direct action campaigns tend to emerge organically within the organization. SEXAGON has a historical legacy of successfully organizing and leading campaigns: in 1997, SEXAGON intervened when the national government threatened to shut off the water supply to farmers who could not pay their fees.⁵⁴ Community members presented their case to local leaders, and the government granted farmers an extension on payment, allowing them to continue farming and remain productive.⁵⁵ This precedent-setting event grew a culture of resistance within the organization, which has allowed SEXAGON to continue direct action efforts and has shaped its organizational identity.

→ **Distributing credit to cooperative groups** and providing skills training about agricultural investment, cooperative group management, community accountability, financial planning and loan repayment

For a diagram of the structure of the microcredit cooperatives, see Appendix I.

For a diagram showing the operational activity and personnel structure of SEXAGON, see Appendix II.

⁵⁴ CIRAD-CIEPAC. "Mali- Syndicat des Exploitants de l'Office du Niger (SEXAGON), Case Study." *Hub Rural* (2005): Web. 14 Apr 2011. <<http://www.hubrural.org/IMG/pdf/08-case-sexagon-rem-jc-091105.pdf>>.

⁵⁵ Ibid

Marketing Plan⁵⁶

SEXAGON's marketing strategy plan includes the following initiatives:

- Create a **clear and visually stimulating website**, replete with the organization's story, press coverage of its activities, member case studies, and a blog that provides updates from the field in real time
- Link the website and blog with **social media campaigns** that will allow international users to get in touch with SEXAGON's work and elicit their support as possible donors and volunteers
- Design and implement a **radio broadcast series** that will be aired in central Mali to acclimate the public to SEXAGON's activities, invite their participation, and effectively reach a non-literate audience
- Pioneer a **cell phone connectivity campaign** that will link farmers geographically using a "phone tree" structure, allowing them to form stronger working relationships with one another and easily stay updated about direct action activities and cooperative group meetings

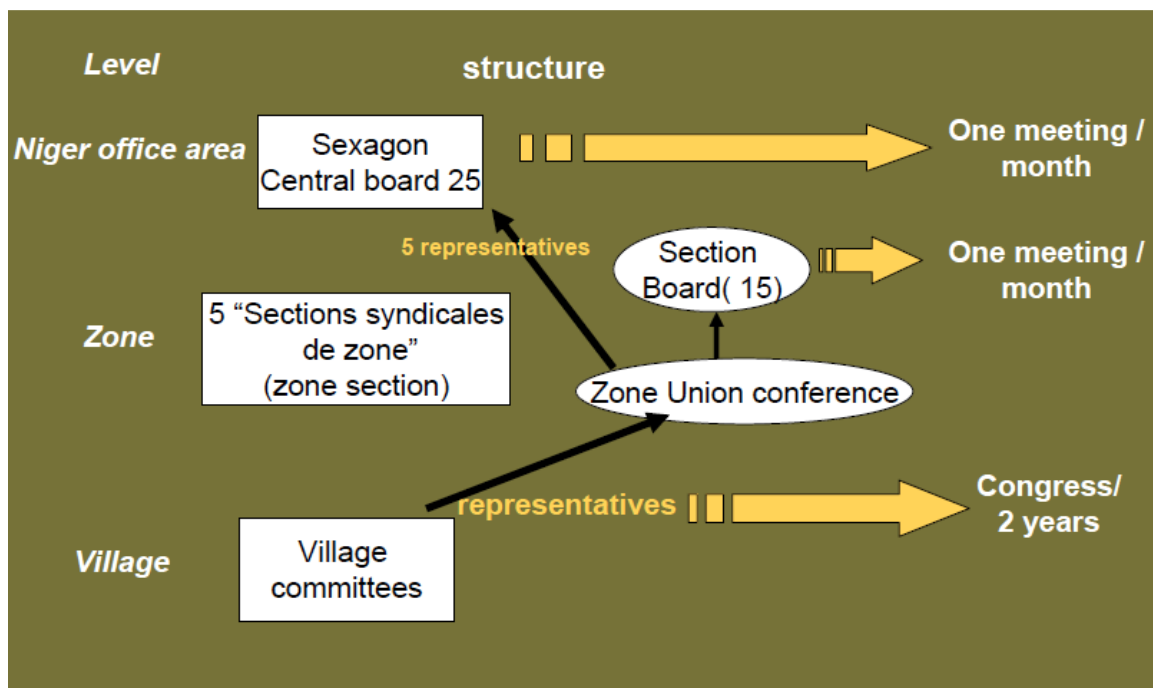
Financial Plan

⁵⁶ No marketing plan currently exists; these are my recommendations.

Appendices of the Business Plan

Appendix I:

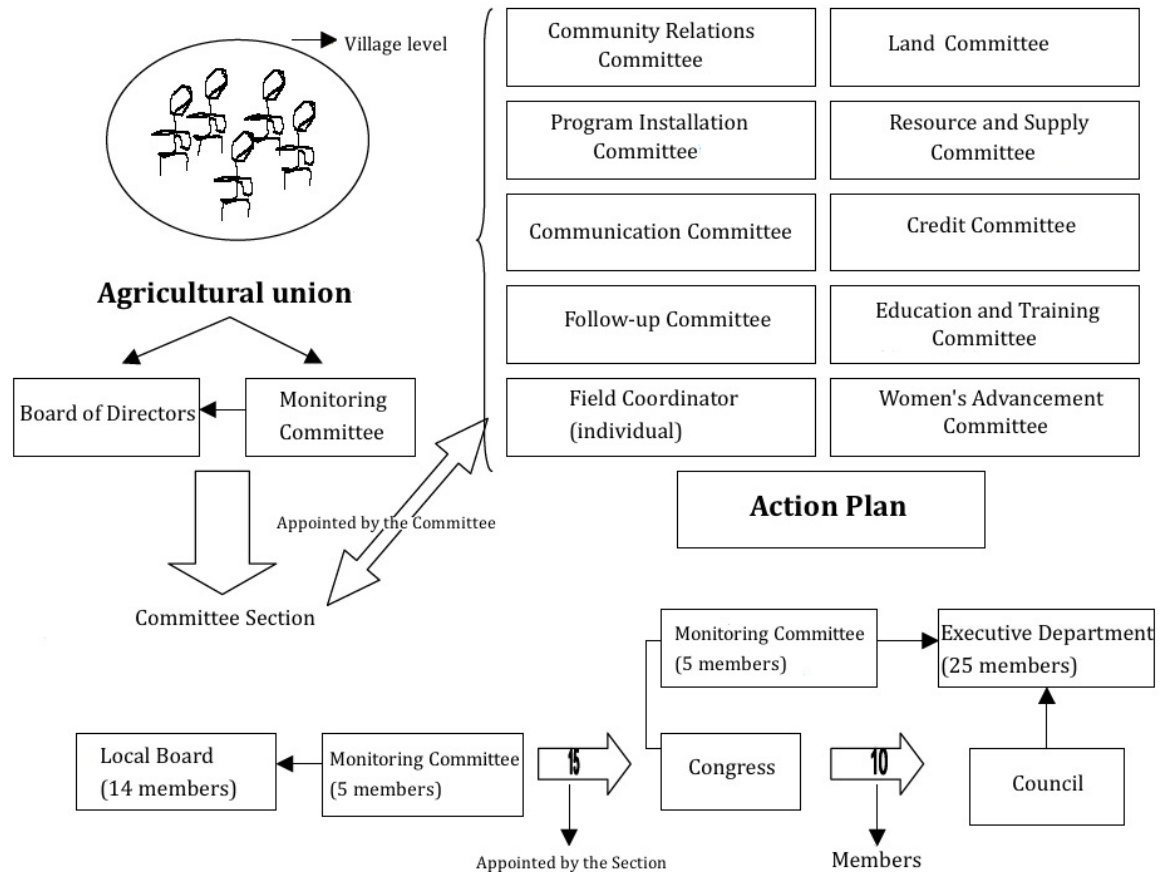
Structure of the Microcredit Cooperatives, Diagram



CIRAD-CIEPAC, 2005

Appendix II:

The various roles and sub-divisions of operational activity within SEXAGON are shown in this diagram:



adapted from Diarra, Lassane⁵⁷

⁵⁷ I adapted this diagram from Diarra's, updating it to reflect recent changes and translating it into English: Diarra, Lassane. "Contribution du syndicat des exploitants agricoles de l'office du Niger (SEXAGON)." *Hub Rural*. Seminaire de Dakar, 21 Jan 2002. Web. 16 Apr 2011. <<http://www.hubrural.org/IMG/pdf/cerise-dakar-sexagon.pdf>>.

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VI. Appendices

Appendix A: Literature Review

Agriculture, social entrepreneurship and civil society in Mali: A review of the literature

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Land grabbing, rural poverty and civil society in Mali, West Africa

Land grabbing in Africa is far from newsworthy, but the responses of the subsistence farmers who are the victims of land seizure are, perhaps for the first time, making headlines. *The New York Times* reports,

“Across Africa and the developing world, a new global land rush is gobbling up large expanses of arable land. Despite their ageless traditions, stunned villagers are discovering that African governments typically own their land and have been leasing it, often at bargain prices, to private investors and foreign governments for decades to come” (MacFarquhar, 2010).

A World Bank study (World Bank, 2010) credits such acquisitions with having the potential to benefit poor countries, but also reports that in many places farmers have been displaced without compensation, lands have been undervalued and are lying fallow, and far fewer jobs have been created than were promised (MacFarquhar, 2010). The takeover of the agricultural sector in West African countries by multinational firms – and the havoc it wreaks on small farming communities – is particularly profound. There has been some effort by civil society organizations and smaller development actors to engage farmers through microenterprise, but the political underpinnings of these tensions have yet to be addressed on a large scale. In light of these seismic changes in agrarian livelihoods, rigorous study of land seizure, rural development, and the political organization of farmers in Africa have never been more vital.

1.2 CNOP (National Coordination of Peasant Farmer Organizations) - Mali⁵⁸

One exception to the widespread political paralysis of farmers is the CNOP (National Coordination of Peasant Farmer Organizations) - Mali, an alliance charged with bringing together dozens of small farming groups and civic organizations in Mali through increased political representation and socio-economic development of smallholders' farms. The CNOP aims to build a long-term, credible peasant farmer movement.⁵⁹ The leadership of the CNOP seeks to become the primary interlocutor between the state/development actors and farmers' groups in the pursuit of a coherent agricultural policy centered on family farms. Sub-goals include clarifying and strengthening the roles of state actors on agricultural policy, increasing and improving information flows and knowledge transfer, mediating conflicts, and leading efforts to ensure long-term sustainability and food sovereignty for Malian smallholders.

2.0 **Civil society and rural development**

The importance of subsistence agriculture in the developing world cannot be underestimated. In a time when 75% of the world's poor live in rural areas, and most are engaged in farming (Deininger and Byerlee, 2011), the state of the world's farmlands merits careful consideration. This area of inquiry becomes more pressing when we consider that one billion people are chronically hungry (Deininger and Byerlee, 2011). In places in the world that are deeply impacted by these problems, there also tends to be an absence of the state as provider of services and protections, which only further exacerbates the problems of farmers who find themselves landless (Schaffler et al., 2011). In reviewing the literature on this topic, what emerges is a tangled web of science, politics, trade, aid and development, all of which are molded by civil society, state, and parastate actors. To streamline such a review, it is necessary to focus on a few of the dimensions of rural development to which scholarly writing has attended or failed to attend in the last decade.

2.1 The new global land rush

As noted in the *New York Times* (MacFarquhar, 2010) and other major news media, the global "land rush," while not a new phenomenon, has amplified in scope and intensity, particularly in Africa (Schaffler, et. al, 2011, Silver-Greenberg, 2009, Godoy, 2009). Deininger and Byerlee's in-depth study is the most extensive of its kind, according to the World Bank, and includes commentary on how the legal framework for indigenous land rights

⁵⁸ In the original French, the name is Coordination National des Organisations Paysannes.

⁵⁹ "Peasant farmer" is a descriptive, rather than pejorative, term in Malian French.

is changing in countries like Mali (p. 147). Deininger and Byerlee confirm and expand the findings of earlier studies, including Borras and Franco (2010) and Cotula et al. (2009). Borras and Franco place the land deals within a legal framework, advocating for a human rights-centered approach to the study of and responses to land seizures from the rural poor. Taking a more interdisciplinary perspective, Cotula et al. outlines the important link between land acquisitions and rising concerns about food security and biofuel production, shining light on some of the political dimensions of the debate, which other authors only briefly mention or neglect entirely.

The advocacy organization GRAIN has participated in the most groundbreaking work to date that attempts to quantify and classify new land acquisitions (GRAIN, 2011), having illustrated through an open forum-style blog the need for clarity and precision in reporting prior to engaging in advocacy (Deininger and Byerlee).⁶⁰ GRAIN's work has been credited and widely cited by major research institutions, think tanks, and donor agencies attempting to make quantitative and qualitative sense of the land rush (Deininger and Byerlee, 2011). Among Deininger and Byerlee, Cotula et al., and Mwangi et al. (2007), whose perspectives on land acquisition are congruous, there are high levels of agreement on the importance of property rights as a means of protection for the rural poor facing land grabbing, with Borras and Franco standing out as the most in favor of legal protection.

Interestingly (and perhaps distressingly), scholarly work on the land acquisitions described above has had to rely on news outlets as intermediary sources of information about the state of the deals (see Deininger and Byerlee, Cotula et al.). This is because of the high levels of secrecy and controversy surrounding land deals, which has erected a veritable roadblock to scholars who would otherwise be using direct source material or data gathered in the field.

2.2 The intersection of civil society and development

Many of these studies of land rights and rural development (Deininger and Byerlee; Borras and Franco; Mwangi et al.) have emphasized the role played by civil society, which merits definition here. Lewis (2005) defines civil society as composed of entities which “serve some public purpose and contribute to the public good” and are characterized by being organized, private, non-profit-distributing, self-governing, voluntary, and of public benefit (p. 240). Common examples include religious groups, educational institutions, professional associations, and advocacy organizations. In studies touching on rural poverty, the roles of farmers' organizations as civil society actors are of particular note.

Within the broad field of rural development, major international development organizations (World Bank, Deininger and Byerlee) and

⁶⁰ farmlandgrab.org is maintained by GRAIN but accepts submissions from any interested parties. Several independent researchers have verified the information posted in the blog (see Deininger and Byerlee, 2011).

agricultural research centers (such as IFPRI; see Mwangi et al.) have been the best-known authors publishing scholarly material about civil society and farming. Opare (2005) adds specificity to these global analyses by emphasizing the importance of community organizations that, though smaller than NGOs, play crucial roles in providing services and contributing to rural development in poor countries. Opare writes that community organizations have the unique ability to spur the formation of collective identity and political activity, which are both vital functions for farming communities, citing the example of Ghana's civil society sector. Pesche (2004) adds that farmers' associations in Mali play a primary role in dialoguing with public institutions, and serve as intermediaries between government and private service providers and research institutions (p. 24). In the same vein, Orvis (2001) addresses critics who say the role of civil society has been exaggerated, maintaining that however contentious arguments about its scope may be, its quotidian function in African social organization cannot be underestimated. He also works to re-frame the very definition of civil society so that it might be more fitting for an African context, and not merely a Western transplant (p. 20). Scholars investigating the role of community groups in rural development have deemed these actors crucial players capable of developing and maintaining extensive cooperative networks and social linkages (Opare, Pesche, Mwangi et al., Orvis).

2.3 Local economies, market prices, and cotton

The aforementioned scholars agree that land takeovers have the potential to negatively impact the agrarian poor. Land seizure is not, however, the only cause of income suppression for poor farming communities. The volumes of scholarly work that have treated the general question of the impact of trade liberalization of agricultural products on local economies in the developing world are too numerous to name here. Within this field, there is a significant body of literature addressing the economic implications of Western domestic payments for cotton crops in particular, their impact on global prices, and finally their related effect on incomes of small farmers. Scholars including Hazard (2005), Alston et al. (2007), and Anderson and Valenzuela (2007) have used great detail to explain the proceedings of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its role in policy changes that have profoundly shaped West African agricultural sectors. Most writers, including the aforementioned authors in addition to Hussein, et al. (2006), Goreux (2004), and Bolton (2008), have arrived at a near consensus on framing the economic impact of cotton subsidies on the markets of developing countries, and major cotton-producers in West Africa in particular, as destructive. Other voices (Baquedano, 2009) insist that the subsidy problem has been overstated, and propose alternative responses to the sector's failures as complements to subsidy removal.

3.0 Malian farmers and grassroots political organization

In this section, I have limited the scope of inquiry to literature that analyzes small actors, local organizations and/or community groups invested in creating and growing the social values of community organization and defense of property rights in West Africa.

3.1 Cooperative community development in Africa

Most of the literature available on the topic of agriculture in Mali is written from an agricultural science perspective and lacks the social analysis that would render it relevant to this discussion. There is also a serious dearth of literature available that analyzes local farmers' organizations like CNOP-Mali. More broadly, anthropologists have studied the intersection of specialized group membership and broader participation in civil society, with special attention paid to hunters' associations in West Africa (Jansen, 2008). Jansen outlines the role of hunters' organizations in the emergence of civil society in Mali, concluding that hunters have not functioned as major contributors to a robust civil society since they are in large part an inauthentic expression of social organization, having been developed largely by the post-colonial government. Still, Jansen argues that Malian communities have benefitted from a long legacy of intricate social organization and inter-clan communication, which continues to serve them well today.

Some researchers have looked at other types of community solidarity activities (non-agricultural in nature) within Mali that create social benefits for their participants. Tefft and Kelly's (2004) study of malnutrition in rural Mali revealed that the factors of increased participation in community organization, land tenure rights for women, and active local government, when combined with increases in farmer income, had a positive correlation with improved child nutrition for individual families. A report by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2003) profiles poor fishing communities in 25 countries in West and Central Africa that have been able to use their collective voice to their own advantage. The report identifies the intrinsic power for self-led development that community associations possess, and that active participation in development efforts in poor communities with limited resources remains a major determinant of success of such programs. One participant reports, "Before, concepts came from experts and consultants, but now it is the people themselves who identify their problems, set priorities and participate in researching solutions" (p. 3). This study also presents the compelling example of a cooperative effort between Ghana's coast guard and small-scale fisherman to crack down on poaching by illegal, oversized vessels, which serves as a transferrable image of partnership for other case studies of this kind. The cases presented by Jansen, Tefft and Kelly, and the FAO all stress the importance of partnership and cooperation for improved social benefit.

These examples of participatory development and community solidarity in West Africa can serve as model cases of development actors seeking to empower subsistence farming communities by actually welcoming their input and decision-making capacity. Earlier work by Egger (1992) predicted this phenomenon, stating that development efforts were gradually shifting to prioritize social gains (which build capacity) over material ones (which offer more limited benefits). This continuing trend toward community-led development is also profiled in Bernard, et al. (2007), who affirm that community organizations are central partners for governments, NGOs and donor agencies engaged in development, but challenge the notion that village organizations are able to effectively reach the rural poor, since that hypothesis has not yet been rigorously studied. Still, the majority of these authors share the view that cooperative development strategies not only hold the most potential for social value creation, but also represent the future trajectory of the field of sustainable development.

3.2 Farmers and political organization in Mali

Significantly less emphasis has been made within the scholarly literature on the role of subsistence farmers' organizations as unifying social forces, with the exception of Hussein, et al. Ward, et al. (2004) investigates the social engagement of women participating in gardening groups funded by major NGOs in Bamako, Mali through ethnographic field study. The study shows that despite the NGOs' claims that they used a "pluralistic approach," involving the local community at every level, Ward et al. discovered that community leadership and cooperation was nominal at best. This study adds valuable insight to the field of study by pinpointing examples of weakness in a reportedly successful development strategy, while simultaneously offering suggestions for improvement. There is virtually no literature available on the unique set of challenges and opportunities facing agrarian professional organizations whose missions overlap that of the CNOP-Mali.

4.0 **CNOP-Mali**

There is no scholarly material available from journals or other academic publications that focuses exclusively on the CNOP. Select international news media outlets have covered its popular, if sometimes controversial, methods and messages (MacFarquhar, 2010). MacFarquhar's is one of the only English-language news articles that contains quotes from a member of CNOP-Mali, Ibrahima Coulibaly, the regional director.

5.0 **Themes, methods, and gaps**

Hazard, Alston et al., Anderson and Valenzuela, Hussein et al., Goreux, and Bolton, who have addressed West Africa's troubled relationship with cotton, have devoted considerable energy to economic analyses of the sector and its role in the

economic development (or lack thereof) of individual countries. Baquedano's economic analysis of the Malian cotton sector and its impact on farmers' decision-making is particularly robust. However, each of these studies has largely neglected the social dimension of agriculture: this dimension includes the impact of cultivation on rural civil society organization; the health effects of the pesticides used in cotton production; and the role cotton farming plays in rural migration and social upheaval.

Notably, Baquedano and Goreux agreed that farmers' incomes could be augmented if they benefitted from improved negotiating power and organization, whether or not Western subsidies were to be removed. Similarly, in discussing the problems posed by foreign land acquisitions, Borrás and Franco, Cotula et al., Deininger and Byerlee, Mwangi et al., The World Bank and GRAIN all either focus on or briefly mention the important role to be played by local farmers' associations and other civil society groups. Though this common theme of the importance of negotiating power runs through almost all of the scholarly material, most studies have failed to probe more deeply for answers to the question of why farmer organization is significant, and precisely how it could improve rural livelihoods.

Scholars have adequately covered the scope of land acquisitions, how it may impact rural livelihoods, and how developing world governments are reacting. Through all of this careful analysis, the reactions of the actual farmers who are suffering losses have been left out. Their voices remain unheard, even as their plights are described. With the exception of MacFarquhar's article, none of the literature contains actual quotes or testimony from farmers themselves. Adding narrative analysis of farmers' experiences to the growing body of literature could prove useful on numerous levels for a variety of actors. Among the watchdogs covering the global land rush, there seemed to be little identification of who benefits most from land deals, even as anecdotal evidence firmly suggests such deals are hugely detrimental to smallholders (MacFarquhar, Schaffler et al.). To engage in a more rigorous analysis of this controversial issue, deeper investigation of the power dynamics of farmers' struggles, with particular regard for which actors benefit from their losses, is necessary.

A major gap in the literature, which is both thematic and methodological in nature, is in assessing the political strategies and processes operated by farmers associations to secure economic and social benefit. Few studies have sought to analyze organizations of West African farmers on a strategic level, isolating which tactics have been successful and which unsuccessful, or provide recommendations for how such strategies could be improved. A slight exception to this claim is the collective work of Baquedano, Moseley, Alston et al., Anderson and Valenzuela, and Hazard, who examined the strategies of cotton farmers' associations represented at the WTO talks as part of the Cotton-4. They did not, however, describe the strategies of average farming communities on a smaller scale.

In brief, while the plight of West African farming communities has been widely detailed and analyzed by scholars, few tangible solutions or practical action plans have been proposed in the literature. Statistically speaking, because the majority of Malians find employment in the agricultural sector, and many are organized into voluntary professional associations like the CNOP, farmers should be

well placed to lead and maintain social movements (Moseley, 2005). Malian farmers also have the added benefit of wide social approval (Jansen). Yet few scholars have highlighted how they might capitalize on these social assets, or why, apart from poverty, they have failed to do so in the past.

While Deininger and Byerlee's study has much to recommend it in terms of rigor and timeliness, its recommendations and solutions are useful exclusively on the state level, for governments interested in improving land administration and economic investment. What is lacking in the literature is study of what farmers themselves can do (and indeed, what they already are doing) and what power they can tap into, politically and socially – within the broader framework of their home countries – to improve their circumstances and resist becoming victims of illegal or ill-conceived land seizure. A deeper level of engagement with land seizure and property issues from a legal perspective would be particularly useful, as it would provide greater context for the challenges facing smallholders in countries whose populations are susceptible to the abuses of power and a lack of the rule of law. This gap in the literature is seen quite profoundly as it applies to the particular case of Mali, who despite an active network of farmers and civil society organizations and a culture of community organization (Jansen) has seen much of its farmland fall into the hands of foreign entities (MacFarquhar). The scholarly and activist communities would do well to undertake a more detailed, case-by-case analysis of the stakes and challenges facing vulnerable populations who experience the effects of the ongoing land rush. The gap widens further still in consulting the literature pertaining to the state of farmers' associations and social entrepreneurship in Mali specifically, rather than the developing world as a whole.

6.0 Conclusion

In broad strokes, scholars have painted the current challenges facing rural communities engaged in agriculture in the developing world as unquestionably severe. While numerous examples and explanations of the economic struggles and obstacles to success of subsistence farmers have been well documented, remarkably fewer scholars have engaged the political dimensions of farmer organization and collective bargaining power. Fewer still have detailed the social dimensions of land ownership and loss, which leaves much uncharted territory in terms of what innovations and entrepreneurial activities small farmers are or could be undertaking to improve their livelihoods. Tackling the very specific question of whether and how farmers can resist takeover of their lands with the force of civil society, and tackling it from more diverse points of view, would be of demonstrable benefit to the field of social entrepreneurship.

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Appendix B: Map of SEXAGON's operations in the Office of the Niger



Emily Bell, 2010

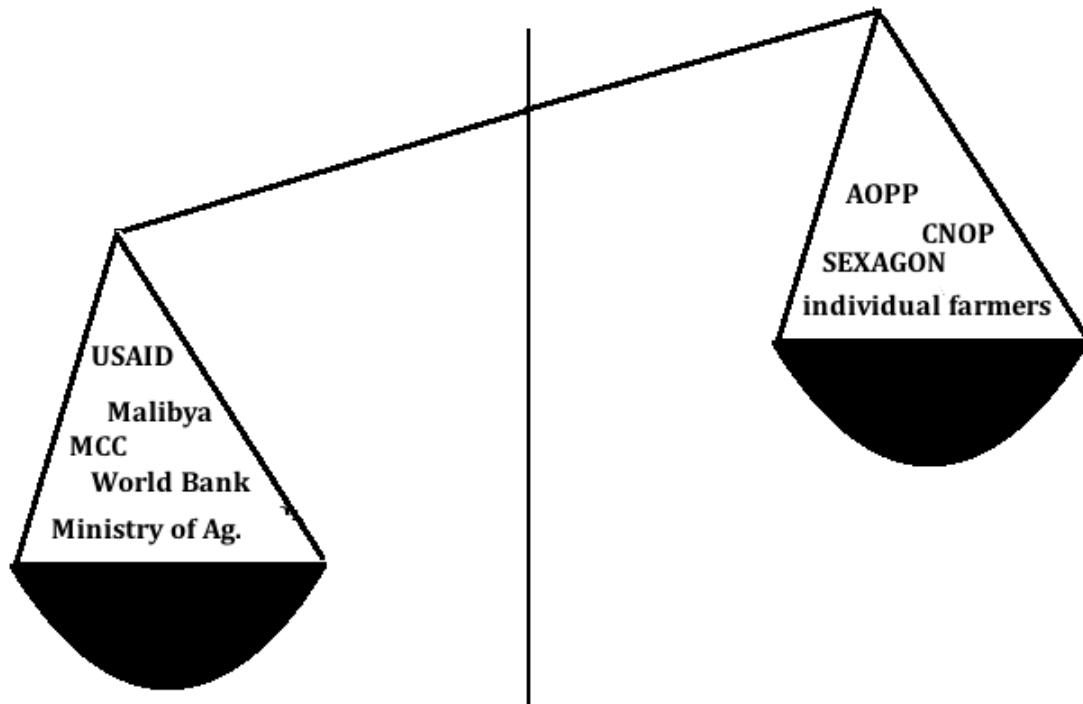
This map shows the geographic boundaries of SEXAGON's area of intervention within the Office of the Niger. The large shaded area on the right side of the map is the property purchased by the Malibya project.

Appendix C: Social value chain diagram

The social value of smallholder farmer sovereignty and prosperity that SEXAGON seeks to create is achieved through its twofold strategy. The following is a pictorial representation of this dual chain that leads to the creation of both social and economic value for family farmers:



Appendix D: Illustration of environmental power dynamic



**Illustration of the political power dynamic among agricultural actors
Office of the Niger, Mali**

This diagram provides a representation of the uneven struggle for political power and voice between small-scale farmers and the grassroots organizations that represent them directly, and the larger-scale development actors that have, in the Malian context, given their support to agreements with foreign governments and multinational corporations rather than directly to small farmers. In order to analyze the activities of any given development actor, it is crucial to understand who has the power, how it is being used, and who is truly being served or disadvantaged by said power. This diagram clearly shows who has the power in the Office of the Niger.

Appendix E: Kellogg's Theory of Change Logic Analysis Diagram

