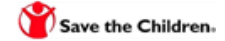




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Harande



Balancing Development and Conservation in the Inner Niger Delta

“Why are we not implementing activities in the Inner Niger Delta?” This was a recurring question raised by Harande field staff and beneficiaries. Harande had planned to implement its development activities in several regions, including the districts of Youwarou and Tenenkou, which both happened to be within the Inner Niger Delta (IND), a Ramsar wetland of international importance. During the development of Harande’s Initial Environmental Examination, it was identified that development activities implemented not only by Harande but also by 17 other programs active in the IND and the Sourou Floodplain Ramsar sites could negatively impact the conservation of these sensitive and crucial ecosystems. As a result of this discovery, USAID/Mali conducted a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) of all USAID-funded activities in these two Ramsar sites in order to outline guidelines for the sustainable implementation of development initiatives within the context of these two protected areas. This comprehensive analysis took two years to be finalized and, in the meantime, Harande interventions in the Inner Niger Delta were brought to a halt. This is when the questions started coming in, from Harande staff and beneficiaries alike, wondering why development activities could not be implemented and what was so special about the IND that required such precautions.

In response to these queries, Harande - with the support of its environmental compliance partner Sun Mountain International – facilitated two workshops touching on this topic. One was held in January 2020 and attended by 22 participants, all field staff intervening in the IND region. The other was held in March 2020 and was attended by 35 staff members from various components and intervention areas. In both workshops, participants were informed of the importance of the IND, the second largest Ramsar site in the world and a site internationally renowned for its important role for waterfowl and other migrating birds wintering in this region, as well as for its fisheries and livestock. Participants were also informed about the potentially negative impacts that certain Harande interventions and livelihood activities, such as irrigation, agricultural expansion, pesticide use, livestock herding and even water and sanitation activities, could have on the ecosystem services provided by the IND Ramsar wetlands. During the second workshop, which was conducted after the USAID/Mali Ramsar PEA was finalized, participants learned about the PEA findings as well as the requirements that all USAID-funded interventions have to follow when implementing development activities within the IND and the Sourou Floodplain. The important role played by each and every Harande staff member to ensure the adequate implementation, monitoring and reporting of compliance requirements was especially highlighted. These workshops gave Harande staff members the answers to the questions they had about the IND Ramsar sites and its

importance, and gave them the necessary resources to share this information with beneficiaries in the field.



Figure 1: Participants during the January 2019 workshop (left) and during the March 2020 workshop, respectively

Following the finalization of the USAID/Mali Ramsar PEA in July 2019, Harande was able to implement interventions in the districts of Youwarou and Tenenkou. After conducting a needs assessment and following discussions with local populations, Harande identified the need for communities to rehabilitate a 6km dike. This dike, located in Penga in the Tenenkou district, had originally been constructed by the Mopti Rice Office in the 1970s and served as both a footpath and a dike. In accordance to the requirements outlined in the USAID/Mali Ramsar PEA, Harande developed a site-specific Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (EMMP) to address the potential impacts this dike rehabilitation may have on the environment and ensure that environmental safeguards and best practices are respected during the siting, construction, as well as the operation and maintenance of this dike beyond project closeout. Measures such as raising awareness of beneficiary communities on the importance of the IND and its wildlife to encourage environmental stewardship were prescribed and implemented in order to mitigate the risks of exposing threatened species to poaching from outsiders who may access remote sites thanks to the rehabilitated dike.



Figure 2: Images of eroded banks of the dike needing rehabilitation

Thanks to these capacity building initiatives and continued environmental compliance, Harande staff and beneficiaries have a better understanding of the environmentally significant contexts within which they operate and the importance of protecting these sensitive ecosystems while ensuring sustainable development within their communities.