



*The committee set up by the Manni city hall took into account community-based contributions from the dam users to build the local land charter and engage them on water resources protection.*

*Photos: TerresEauVie,*

*Left: Committee in front of the city hall, October 2020*

*Right: Committee next to the dam, February 2021*

# Communities Unite to Protect Vital Water Supplies in Burkina Faso

*TerresEauVie Burkina Faso*

Located within the Sahel, a semi-arid region below the Sahara with long stretches of dry weather punctuated by brief rains, the northern regions of Burkina Faso are plagued by drought and water shortages. Here, people’s ability to reliably collect, store and distribute water – especially during the dry season -- is crucial to both food security and economic development.

Take the example of the Manni Dam, which supplies 10 communities in the Est Region with water required for everything from brickmaking to laundry, as well as water for livestock and irrigation for growing food staples like rice. In recent years, poor farming practices increased water pollution, and erosion has caused this life-giving water source to dry up a little bit earlier each season – jeopardizing the ability of community members to make a living and contributing to conflicts as people struggle to claim their share of the diminishing water supply.

**“Water is no longer sufficient for off-season growing. We have to act.”** His Majesty Yembilima, customary chief of Malioma (village bordering the dam).

To help communities sustain the vital water source and ensure equitable access for both domestic and commercial water users, USAID’s TerresEauVie Activity, implemented by Winrock International, helped revive a community-driven planning process that utilizes transparently developed “local land charters” in a process that is now serving as a model for other TERRESEAUVIE supported communities facing similar struggles in the region.

With TerresEauVie’s guidance, community leaders began by ranking the most urgent factors contributing to water depletion. At the top of the list: non-compliance with rules preventing farming within 100 meters (around 328 feet) of the dam’s perimeter. That land is supposed to be preserved as a permanent forest, intended to prevent erosion and preserve the water quality by filtering pollutants from runoff such as pesticides, fertilizers, plastic waste, and manure. Instead, gardeners cultivating vegetable crops like tomatoes and onions have encroached into the area around the banks each dry season, which runs from about November to April.

With trees removed or thinned to make room for vegetables, the lack of well-rooted forest cover along the banks accelerated erosion, enabling silt to accumulate and reducing the volume of water available, year by year. And as the first winter rains arrived, runoff carried more fertilizers straight into the dam, killing fish and livestock. The steadily worsening situation created disputes between dam users, some resulting in destruction of crops and even violent conflicts. Local leaders attempted to intervene each time.

As TerresEauVie consulted with community leaders and delved into local land-use regulations, a novel idea materialized: What if the communities, themselves, created (and agreed on) simple but specific “local land charters” – for which the structure was already provided under Burkina Faso land tenure law? Local land charters are relatively short, straightforward documents—prepared by communal stakeholders and enacted by the local population—that state clear rules and penalties for non-compliance. After discussing the idea with TerresEauVie, the Manni mayor decided to try it, and assembled a committee that met with more than 170 dam user representatives from 10 affected communities.

Input from inter-communal representatives led to a draft land charter setting out new, agreed measures to protect the dam, including reforestation along the perimeter, promotion of improved irrigation to enable farming further from the water, and use of bio-pesticides and manures. The charter also set penalties for farming within 100 meters of the dam and for dumping garbage on its banks, and established a representative management committee to enforce the charter and monitor progress.

“Community involvement in land charter development is really good because it allows the population to talk about the risks related to poor practices and

mismanagement,” said Issa Outattara, a representative from the Burkina Faso Ministry of Agriculture, which reviewed the charter to ensure compliance with national legislation. “Everyone involved in dam management and irrigation was engaged and consulted to draft the document.”

**“It is good to involve the population because without it, the charter would not be enforced. One should not discuss someone’s fate in their absence.”** His Majesty Yembilima

After working together to develop these solutions, the dam users’ representatives unanimously approved the charter, and began steps to implement it with the support of local communities and partners. Manni’s local water committee is engaged and will inform and support the new dam management committee. TerresEauVie is assisting in communication and outreach efforts by developing radio messages, posters and helping to organize community sensitization sessions with local partners. State agricultural services are involved too, and are providing extension guidance to gardeners on topics including how to grow vegetables with less water and using “boulis,” or small artificial water bodies, to maximize water use. Finally, the Liptako Water Agency has agreed to support reforestation of the 100-meter perimeter around the dam and marking the area with signs to make users aware of the boundary.

“This agreement will definitely enable us to preserve our natural resources for the benefit of the population and for future generations in a peaceful manner,” said Dambina T. Albert, First Deputy Mayor of Manni.

By working together, community members in Burkina Faso are building resilience and contributing to the sustainability of vital natural resources and infrastructure for those who rely on it – both today and for the future.

USAID’s Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced (RISE) project has been implemented in Niger and Burkina Faso since 2012. The second phase, RISE II, continues the same efforts with the overall goal that chronically vulnerable populations in Burkina Faso and Niger, supported by resilient systems, effectively manage shocks and stresses and pursue sustainable pathways out of poverty.

Within RISE II and led by Winrock’s Sustainable Water Partnership, the USAID “TerresEauVie” Activity enhances communes’ self-reliance by making social and ecological systems resilient through three components: (1) Improved water security; (2) Enhanced sustainable productive land use; and (3) Improved management of shocks, risks and stresses.