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**“Malian Associations in France and Socio-Ecological Development of  
Kayes (Mali)” .**

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**[Work in progress]**

**Abstract**

How can we explain the evolution of a particular society through exchange between local populations and members of this community who migrate? What initiatives has a specific diaspora group undertaken? Recent trends reveal that international migration in its various forms challenges important forms of social organisation (Geddes, 2003). This assumption reflects the argument that the dynamism of diaspora contribute to the socio-ecological development of a local environment. Drawing from my doctoral research, this presentation analyses the impact of Malian associations in France on the transformation of the rural region of Kayes in Mali. This region is particular because of its high emigration rate. Majority of Malians in France come from Kayes's region and this long term migration began during the post second world war economic boom in France and was made possible due to the economic treaties binding both countries. After, the 1981 law in France which permitted all migrants to form their associations, Malian hometown associations became more visible in the French

society. This specific diaspora is organized into a wide range of regional and ethnic association. The paper could shed some lights on a number of variables which explain the above stated research questions through at least three hypotheses. -First, the involvement of Malians associations in many social projects contributes to the development of Kayes. These régional and ethnic associations survive on substantial collective savings which help sustain “the insiders” and support for developmental projects. To illustrate this point, following the construction of some schools in Kayes, social hierarchy emerged through the emancipation of youth and women. Second, these associations cooperate with NGOs in the execution of their projects, in order to benefit from their expertise, skills and knowledge such as the installation of an irrigation system which transformed this desert area into a flourishing agricultural settlement. Lastly, since the process on decentralization (1993) in Mali, these associations have entered into cooperation with French local authorities, in order to learn and benefit from the latter’s democratic expertise which they will in turn use in the training of their officials. This paper highlights the paradigm of transnational spaces in policy analysis. It focuses essentially on development and diaspora and can be viewed as a new approach to poverty reduction.

**KEYWORDS:** Migrants, diaspora, co-development, transnationalism, development policies, Mali, France.

## INTRODUCTION

Although the debate on the impact of international migration on development in Africa has largely been shaped by brain drain, skilled African movement to the developed world, growing evidence shows that international migration has positive effects on social, ecological and economic development in Africa. Mali is generally considered among the poorest countries around the world, but it is also considered as one of the most promising democracies in West Africa. This country became a French colony in the 1890s and gained its independence of French colonial rule in 1960. The country immediately adopted a socialist economic model with rural cooperatives. Military leader Moussa Traore became president after a 1968 coup and enacted a new constitution in 1974.

The democratic uprising led by students in 1991 resulted in the election of Alpha Oumar Konare and a new constitution in 1992. President Konare was re-elected in 1997. New elections were scheduled in 2002 and the elections and re-election in 2007 of Ahmani Toumani Toure marking peaceful democratic transition. The Kayes region of western Mali is an interesting case for many reasons. First it turns out that most Malian migrants to France come to this place and the contribution of this diaspora for the development of their region is relevant.

Second, the data shows that all the people of the Kayes area are not equally concerned by migration to France; once an ethnic group is significantly more involved in it than the others, namely the Soninke. (Gubert, Azam, 2002). This study draws information from three sources: a literature review, many interviews and investigation. First, the study reviewed the available literature documenting Malian transnational dynamism “Here” and “There”. Second, the study also made many interviews in order to obtain relevant information in the

Malian association, NGOs and local collectivities. Lastly, this study analysed migrants' development actions in Kayes.

### **Malian association in France: a transnational dynamism**

During these past decades, there has been a growing interest in the sustained connections between emigrants and their countries of origin. The variety of such social, economic and political actions, flows and exchange are known collectively as transnational practices. A transnational perspective challenges the rigid notion of emigration and return and instead focuses on the processes that take place within the transnational social field that is shared by migrants and non-migrants (Jorgen Carling, 2005).

Malian transnational communities do not belong exclusively to either home or host country; they have connections with and owe allegiances to both: they are "Here" (France) and "There" (Kayes). The contributions from the Malian diaspora are largely in the form of financial remittances. Remittances sustain livelihoods through increased purchasing power for food, education, health, consumer goods, housing and other essential services. According to Adams and Page (2003), international migration has a strong impact in reducing poverty.

The Kayes area is of particular attention because of its high emigration rate and this long term migration began during the post second world war economic boom in France and was made possible thanks to the economic treaties binding France and Mali. Migrants also left this region during droughts in the early 1970s. After the 1950s in France, they work together and constitute solidarity's funds which helped them to solve their problems in France. At the beginning of the 1970s, these Malian associations played an increasingly active role in financing projects to improve living conditions and promote development in their home communities during the years of drought and starvation in

Mali. Their action has been part of a long tradition of community and ethnic solidarity.

After the 1981 law in France which permitted all migrants to form their associations, Malian hometown association became more visible in France. Based in a deep sense of village and community solidarity, they have traditionally contributed to the development of their home community through transfer of funds and they have been doing this in a more innovative and organized manner.

The way these associations organized are shaped by a number of factors which include actual historical connections with Kayes area, degree of stability and social inclusion in current home, social consciousness, level of education and so on. These associations collect and channel migrants funds and use them to finance, wholly or in part, a variety of productive projects in their home communities.

Likewise, the *Gidimaxa Jikké* Association, created in 1987, an organization of immigrants from the Kayes region, now living in Seine-Saint-Denis in France (Le Guay, 2005). This hometown gather members of 24 villages of the Kayes area and are contributing to the improvement of infrastructure, including roads. They facilitate the development of markets in the region through the improvement of roads for transformation. Thus, *Guidimaxa jikké* in some instances collaborate more directly with their region and become strategic actors and mediators in promoting community projects and ensuring their sustainability.

### **The target of Co-development and Malian Diaspora**

A couple of years, the French government have signed a number of protocols with certain African countries in the area of development aid with the objectives to deal with immigration flows. The understanding is, if we help African to develop their own societies, it will limit their desire to come in Europe. Mali is one of several countries that is a target of the French policy of co-development. It aims to link migration and development policies. Under this co-development program, the French government provides technical and financial supports to association of migrants from Mali in the development of their country.

Although the Program is yet to make a major impact, it has opened up new avenues of action under the government policy of development cooperation. A process of cooperation involving public authorities, migrant associations, NGOs and the private sector emphasis local development and the role of local authorities. In other ways, Mali and France have established the Mali-France consultation on migration between the two countries.

In an official agreement signed on December, 2000, the representative of the two countries agreed to meet at least once a year at the ministerial level to deal with three issues: the integration of Malians who want to remain in France, the co-management of migration flows, the development cooperation. This development aid policy aim at improving the socio-economic life of some Africa countries, particularly Mali; at the end, it is going to reinforce the activities of immigrants communities to develop their own communities.

This process helps to maintain close and continuing relations both in France and Mali and was sustained by these associations. The Kayes area now has a

migrant-remittance based economy, with an estimated 80-90 per cent of remittances spent on current consumption. This transfer of values contribute to the development assistance of Kayes; in addition, a large amount is transferred through informal channels. A significant proportion of Malians' savings accumulated in France was channelled through migrants association to finance community assets in the region including construction of some schools and health facilities. These hometown initially focused on migrant integration and welfare in the host country, are now more concerned with economic cooperation and development and serve as valuable links between the host and the home countries.

More recent research has attempted to place more emphasis on the significant positive impact of remittances at the local level. Remittances are often used to invest in human capital, through paying healthcare or education. In the Kayes area, there was 25 maternities hospitals in 1984 (for one million inhabitants), 50 in 1989 and 76 in 1992; build with the emigrants's remittances. It is noticeable that, decade after decade; there was a multiplication of healthcare system. Likewise, the constructions of schools have raised the number of children going to school.

The increase schooling has an impact on social hierarchy through the emancipation of youth and women; indeed, the emigration promote changes in local society. Women are more emancipate and they are obliged to provide a means of economic sustenance for their family and they are also grouping in developed association link with emigrants hometown. Youth and women acquire new rights because of the incidence of this transnational dynamism. Often, the reference to western values focused on the greater freedom given to women and youth.

### **Malian Association and French Local Collectivities**

According to Franck Petiteville(1995:32),”cooperation décentralisée”refers to policies of decentralising aid practises to institutions below the level of the state,especially local authorities.This specific cooperation stress the importance of involving institutions in both North and South so that, all are jointly engaged on development policies.Franco-malian twinnings involve French-suburban municipalities with significant populations of migrants instigating them (Petiteville,1995:265).It is obvious that, since the third Republic in Mali and the birth of democratic institutions, this process has ameliorate the decentralization laws.

It is possible to consider this form of cooperation as a real accelerator of development from the time that it reduces the intermediaries between the donors and beneficiaries’ .This twinning policies between Malian cities and France also comes into the framework of this decentralized cooperation. The case of Saint-Denis, an inner suburb in the Paris region with a large population of migrants from Mali whom has an agreement with “Gidimaxa Jikké” is relevant. This Malian regional association. (Grillo, Riccio, 2004; Le Guay, 2002), which brings together some 3000 Malian migrants from the collectivity of Aourou(24 villages with a population of 45,000 in the administrative circle of Kayes)living mainly in the Seine-Saint-Denis department. They have understood the need to cooperate to be able to act in large scale in the district or regional level.

This French local collectivity deals with Malian diaspora concern and integrates migration policies in their development strategies. ”Gidimaxa Jikké”has helped build many infrastructures in Kayes area and they prioritize questions related to water supplies, school, health and agriculture. The cooperation began in 1989, following a first meeting, and in 1993, Saint-Denis signed a financial support for



literacy campaign in the villages. In 1998, an agreement binding “Guidimaxa Jikké” and Saint-Denis aimed at medicine supplies in Aourous’ health centres. Because it is concentrated in a particular region, the dynamism of emigrants is more visible. Thus, this region benefits from the actions of immigrants associations, which are also present in the villages.

### **The Importance of NGOs**

The Kayes area like most of Mali is wracked by desertification, deforestation and soil degradation. Malian associations cooperate with NGOs in the execution of their projects, in order to benefit from their expertise, skills and knowledge. These associations are close to civil society which aim at filling the gap of the state incapacity to provide services. The case of “Ps-Eau”<sup>1</sup> and GRDR<sup>2</sup> are very emblematic in this water-scarce-region. Among other things, these Malian associations made this cooperation to contribute to the development of hydraulic networks’ to improve agricultural productions.

In this context, the GRDR (Group of research and achievements for the rural development in the Third World), with the support of the Nord/Pas-de-Calais area, the European Union and the French Mission of co-operation and cultural action of Bamako, in dialogue with the professional organizations of irrigating area of Kayes, undertakes a programme of “Development of the country irrigation”. This experiment makes it possible to draw up an inventory of fixtures of the situation of the irrigation by pumping.

The perimeters irrigated most commonly known in area of Kayes are the Community irrigated perimeters. This form of small irrigation was impelled approximately thirty years ago by the State, ONG and the communities of

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<sup>1</sup> Create in 1984 this french NGO specialized in water and irrigation system in the sahel area.

<sup>2</sup>

migrants residing in France. In 1997, 26 functional Community perimeters were listed; they are especially localised downstream from Kayes, zone as a populated majority of Soninké communities. These perimeters were largely subsidized in their phases of installations and installation of the equipment.

## **CONCLUSION**

Migration can be positive for country of origin because migrants can play a role as actors for development. Encouraging this type of development may perhaps strengthen transnational social capital. Interactions between host and home country may certainly improve the process of poverty reductions in Kayes area as evident in this study. In this globalized world, this specific synergy can certainly contribute in making development a reality for poor people.

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