Four interviewing sites were selected in Niger, with the assistance of Dr K. Mariko, Ibrahim Mamane and Zeinabou Ba, students at the University of Niamey, interviewed settled farmers in Takieta, near Zinder, on the proposed site of an SOS Sahel agro-forestry project. A second group of students conducted interviews in areas where projects had ended. In Abalak, a site where many pastoralists were settled after the 1984-85 drought, Ibrahim Abdoulaye and Melle Ibrahim Habitsou spoke to pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, and also to communities of small-scale irrigated farmers and fishermen. These interviews were conducted in Hausa, Peulh and Tamashek. Kollo Mamadou Ousmane interviewed a group of Hausa-speaking settled farmers in Tibiri. He also carried out work at the fourth site, Boubon, where he interviewed local fishermen participating in a fish-farming project, as well as sedentary farmers. Interviews were conducted in Hausa and in Djerma, and were coordinated by Rhiannon Barker.

Hadiza Hassane (F, 80 years), Djéouta

Hadiza told her story sitting in the shade of a tree, her two 50-year-old sons shouting directly into her deaf ears and trying to take over the narrative themselves when their mother's memory needed jogging.

I was born in Garagoumsa village, a few kilometres away. My parents were farmers and hunters. My father decided to leave and was the first to arrive here and dig a well. Thanks to his efforts, we were able to settle; and many of our relatives from Garagoumsa came to join us. When we arrived, there was nothing here but huge trees. The forest was so thick that, even in daylight, it was enough to scare you. As each relative arrived, they cut down trees to clear enough space to build their houses. So many trees were cut down that the forest began to turn into a field. Little by little the village grew and the beautiful big trees disappeared. Now we can no longer find the trees once used for traditional medicine, men have cut them all down. Baobabs are still grown in people's compounds and its fruits and flowers boiled and eaten. An infusion of the bark of the yano tree is
drunk to treat haemorrhoids, and the very hard wood of one tree is made into pestles and mortars for grinding grain.

After the millet and cotton harvest, we would put some cotton aside to weave the wraps we wear. We were really very poor. We had only one **boubou** between the whole village! If it came about that someone wanted to go to another village, the chief would lend him the **boubou**, which would have to be given back on return. So you see, my daughter, only one **boubou** between all the village! How could we have possibly survived like that? My father wove two **pagnes**. One was used to bury his father or mother; the other was given to me on the day of my marriage. It was with this cloth that I was joined to my husband. This tradition is now totally changed. My daughters spend lots of money on their children.

Unlike today, there were many animals in this region: doe, antelope, hare and gazelle. After harvest, my father would go off hunting. The family would eat some, the rest would be sold to our neighbours in the

"We would like a grinding mill—we women spend about three hours each day pounding grain to make boule." Group of women, Kongomé village.
market. Sometimes he would go into the bush for weeks or even months, catching and selling wild game to make money to pay his taxes. If he did not earn enough, he had to sell some of our millet.

**The rights of wives**

I was the first of three wives. When my husband wanted a second wife he said nothing to me. Husbands do not have to tell their wives what they do. When our husband died, the other wives returned to their relatives. Land inheritance follows Islamic law. When you live alone with your husband, sharing of land poses no problems because it all goes to your children. It is more complicated, however, when there are other children by other wives. Then, if the father dies, the land is divided between everyone. According to Islam, the man has a right to twice the woman’s share.

The weather is always unpredictable. One year the rains failed and it was very hot. Everything and everyone was thirsty. The ponds dried up. Both men and animals died. The soil cracked and everything had the pallor of near death. We resorted to going into the bush to gather wild baobab leaves to make soup. We suffered that year. Another year a terrible whirlwind blew off the roofs of our houses, broke the millet stems and carried animals away with it. It was a sad time. Another time, locusts destroyed our crops so badly that they created a famine. We tried to fight them in our traditional ways—killing them by hand and scaring them away—but, unfortunately, these “migrants” proved stronger than us.

Immigrants make up about half of the village. Since they have stayed here, we have become their relatives and live together. The village pastoralists never let their animals damage our fields, but migrant pastoralists really get on our nerves. They leave their animals free to damage crops. Sometimes, farmers and pastoralists fight each other over this. I remember when one such fight resulted in terrible injuries and someone even died.

**Declining harvests**

Farming has become more difficult. In my day, we had vast areas of free space and could leave fields fallow to revitalise the soil. Today, everywhere seems to be occupied and people have to plant the same land year after year, especially if they only own one field. This impoverishes the soil and results in poor harvests. In the past, we would get 100 to 150, sometimes even 200 bundles; nowadays, we can hardly manage 60 to 80 because the soil is so poor. Those with money try to improve the situation by buying chemical fertilisers. Some wage labourers in the area, called **baremas**, will work in the fields for 80 CFA per hour. During the famine,
they worked for millet, not money.

We have no vegetable gardens because there is no permanent or reliable source of water. Nor is there anywhere to fish. The fish which people eat are brought from Nigeria, which has good markets. After a good harvest, our men sell some of our millet and buy pagnes, soap and boubous for themselves, their women and children.

The recent introduction of farm machinery, locust control and chemical fertilisers has greatly helped our children. We had none of the advantages of these modern methods in my day.

Wild dogs for sale

It was clear that Hadiza was tired with the strain of having to listen and respond to our questions. The clear sounds of a flute filled the air and Hadiza's son went and found the flautist, who told us his story.

My name is Maima Dau Sarkiu and I left my village in Nigeria 13 days ago. I walk from village to village in search of wild dogs. Here, in Niger, people do not sell dogs, I am given them as presents. On this trip, I have collected 13. In Niger, I have to walk everywhere with my dogs because drivers refuse to take them on their buses. When I reach a village, I tie the dogs up outside, then enter and look for new ones. I carry this leather sack of traditional medicines with me everywhere I go. When walking round the bush, one must always take such precautions. When I have been given a dog, I like to do something in return, such as supplying a remedy for a certain ailment. If I get hungry along the way, I kill and cook one of the dogs: they are delicious! My father and my grandfather used to do this, so why can't I? When I have collected enough, I go home. In Nigeria I can find cars or lorries which will take them to my home village where I sell them, using the money to pay for my education.

Maima then picked up his hollow bamboo flute and began to play a tune to call the wild dogs to him.

Fauré Maussa (F, 90 years), Djéouta

I was not born here. I married young and came here, to my husband's village. I am a Tuareg, the daughter of pastoralists. My father owned one of the biggest herds in the region: maybe between 200 and 400 cows, goats, camels and sheep. Each species was the responsibility of a different shepherd. My mother and the rest of my family moved around with my father, unless he was going very far, in which case we stayed at our base. During these long journeys, my brothers helped my father pasture the
N2 Zauley Souley (F, 78 years), Djéouta
The tanwa is a little plant whose leaves are shaped like a rose. If a woman is having a difficult labour then the plant is put in water. If the woman is going to have a long labour, then the leaves of the plant will close up, whereas if it is only going to take “one second to the next”, the leaves open.

N20 Issoufou (M, 66 years), Garagoumsa
I think improved communications would be an important development. We need to be able to see and hear (but particularly to see) what is happening in other parts of Niger and other countries in the world. We have no televisions here, which is a shame considering their importance.

Our animals were all marked, so we could identify them if they were lost or stolen. It is best to have a ratio of four females to one male in a herd, though not always so good to keep them together, because they fight. Males are bigger and sturdier, so raise more money when they are sold.

Animal reproduction
My father regulated the timing of the animals’ births by tying the males’ testicles—a technique only really possible on goats, as other animals are too powerful to hold. It is better for animals to give birth during the rainy season, when vegetation is plentiful and the young receive enough milk. Thus you take account of the gestation period when calculating when to untie the testicles. Camels, horses and donkeys have the longest gestation: 12 months. Donkeys are the most regular, they are as good as a calendar. If you show a female donkey to a male, you can be sure that, 12 months later to the very day, she will give birth. Sheep take seven months, cows nine and goats six. Chickens and guinea fowls are much quicker: chicken eggs take 20 days and guinea fowls’ eggs take 26 to hatch. Knowing this, we used to take fresh chicken eggs and put them under a guinea fowl that had already been sitting on her eggs for six days, and she would sit on the chicken eggs and nurture the offspring as her own.

When a Tuareg man dies, his animals are given to his wives, who decide how to distribute them among their children. Boys and girls are both entitled to some inheritance. Following Islamic tradition, males receive twice as much as females. If a man dies who has more than one wife, a marabout is called in to apportion the inheritance fairly between each wife.

A pilgrimage
Once, my husband and I decided to go on a pilgrimage to Makkah, the birthplace of Mohamed. In those days, there were no cars or planes. We
We had to do the journey on foot. Thousands of us, many with children, set off on this trek. We prepared for our departure: I sold all my animals to raise money for the journey; my husband bought lots of millet, maize, oil and other commodities; I pounded grain to make enough flour to keep us going for a month; and I bought eight donkeys. We needed four to carry our provisions, such as food and cooking pots, and four to ride. Every two days, I swapped the donkeys’ burdens: those carrying provisions then carried us. In this way, we travelled for days, months, years...walking, walking, walking...men, women and children alike. Allah alone knows the number of deaths that occurred during this long journey. Sometimes we stopped to cook, rest—and bury our dead.

Occasionally, we fought powerful bandits—for up to a week or more. They stopped at nothing to steal our possessions. Thankfully, among our group there were some important *marabouts*, who could make us disappear from our enemies. As the enemy approached, he lost his sight and so we could pass by unnoticed with our possessions. Only after overcoming thousands of difficulties did we arrive in Sudan, where we travelled by car and foot to a large town, where our hardships were finally over and we caught a plane to Makkah. Once there, we made ourselves at home and practised some small-scale trading. When we arrived back in Niger, we realised we had been away for seven years. It was a terrible journey.

I had four children born in Makkah. My oldest son is still there and refuses to come home. He is married with three children. He wrote, saying that he had decided to come and look for us this year, so that he can take us all to live with him. We are waiting for him.

*A traditional skill*

*Fauré became lost in deep thought. Her friend and neighbour, who was sitting in our circle and had been trying to interrupt throughout, could be restrained no longer.*

I am the village coiffeur traditionnel, responsible for the tribal markings on the children’s faces. To become a coiffeur traditionnel, you need to be taught the art by someone with years of experience. After being trained, you need his permission before you can practise. If you don’t seek his permission, then your art is doomed to failure. I knew a man in Koundoumawa who marked the face of a one-week-old child, but he had omitted to ask permission from the old coiffeur traditionnel, so the cuts became infected and the child died.

Children are marked with a hot sharp knife at the age of one week.
Boys and girls are given the same markings as their father. In the past, this was done because intertribal wars were frequent and children used to be taken hostage during raids. The marks were important to help identify the area from which the child had been taken, enabling its parents to buy the child back, if they so wished. I remember my grandparents talking of such events but I have never experienced them myself. Today, the custom is beginning to die out, since there is no longer a practical need for such markings. I also practise traditional medicine. Look at the scars on the back of this boy.

As he spoke, he pulled one of the young boys to the ground and, lifting up his shirt, pointed to some patches on his back where many tiny slits had been made with the edge of a heated knife. Taking a hollowed-out goat's horn from an old leather sack, the coiffeur traditionnel placed the larger end of the horn against the cuts. Then, putting his mouth to the thin end, he sucked hard to build up pressure and draw blood out of the cuts, filling the horn. As the blood is drawn out, it is believed, illness is taken away with it.

The coiffeur traditionnel also circumcised boys, usually between the ages of seven and nine, although recently some families have taken their children to the dispensary. Enjoying the chance to demonstrate his skills, he grabbed another unsuspecting young onlooker and, pulling down the boy's shorts, displayed his delicate work.

Of course, circumcision hurts a bit because you take a knife to it. After circumcision, the child is given a special meal of chicken, fish and chips. The good food ensures that he is quickly healed. After this feast, he goes back to eating from the family plate.

**Group interview with five women, Kongomé**

We talked with the women under the shade of a tree. A bowl of boiled beans was placed in the middle of the circle, so people could eat as they spoke. This small village was unusual in that each person's house touched directly on to their field.

For many years, Kongomé village had no chief, but the colonial government persuaded us to elect one. As the village was large and well-populated, we decided to elect two chiefs: one for the Hausa and one for the Tuareg. Today, both chiefs live closely together and always consult each other carefully before taking any decision. They only have one place for their meetings and one school. Taxes can be paid to either chief. The
Traditionally, chiefs tell us that they are like real brothers and that only death will separate them.

**Mixed marriages**

Most villagers are Hausa; traditionally, sedentary farmers. The Tuareg are nomads by birth. Both races get on very amicably in the village. The children all play together. If you go to the home of a Tuareg, you will find children with a Hausa mother and a Tuareg father or vice versa. Mixed marriages have brought the two races surprisingly close together. This good rapport goes back to our grandfathers’ time: the first two village chiefs swore they would never betray one another and lived according to their vow. One of them told his sons and men:

> Do not forget the oath taken between the two parts of the village. Whoever takes over from me is worthy of your respect, and you—you must be sure that the day never comes when somebody says that you have worried your brothers. If you manage this you may always remain justifiably proud.

With these words, the old chief died but we still respect his wishes. So, if an adult is walking along and finds two children arguing, he will correct them and reason with them without trying to find out whose children they are. We teach them to like and respect each other.

The chief nominates the president of the village women. Her job is to keep them informed of decisions and to mobilise them for community labour. When visitors come to the village, she has to organise the cooking and to welcome them; if there is a festival in a neighbouring village, to which Kongomé’s youth are invited, she has to provide for the event. Also, she is our representative at meetings in Takiéta which concern women.

**Midwives**

There are two women midwives in our village. One stays with the women for the first week after the birth of the baby: the other stays for a month. One is Tuareg and the other Hausa. Mothers are the ones who pay the midwife and they can choose either of them. If it’s a boy, they have to pay seven blocks of soap, a calabash full of millet and 500 CFA. If it’s a girl, they might buy a pagne for the midwife. The midwives go together to Takiéta, where they receive products to help with their work.

This village has no water, no pump and no well, so we cannot have a market. The ground is so rocky that we cannot dig traditional wells. Young people have to walk 6 kilometres to fetch water in the dry season. They leave at six in the morning and don’t return until midday; sometimes they have to go again in the evening. Before a well was built in Djéouta, we
used to walk 10 kilometres to a never-failing pond. It was very punishing.

Much has changed. Not one of us five old women chose our husband. Perhaps that explains why four of us were so unhappy that we got divorced. Divorce is not difficult but you have to return the bride-price to your husband’s family. Today, we let our children decide whom they want. The problem is that young girls tend to be disobedient and do whatever they want. To afford their marriage, we have to sell everything we own to satisfy them. Unless you are rich, it is difficult to get married. As yet, we have no modern means of contraception, but we did once ask our president to bring us back some contraceptive pills from Takiéta.

In Kongomé, we cultivate everything we can. Millet grows for four months, groundnuts and maize for three months, and haricot beans take 40 days. This area is just wet enough for sorghum, which is well adapted to the cold. Sorghum harvests are normally plentiful and in a good year we employ baremas to help us on the land. One weed persistently resists annual weeding: it is a wicked thing that reduces our harvest. If you know any way of getting rid of this plant, then please help us. In the lowlands, the soil is rocky. There is a seasonal pond down there but these days it doesn’t last more than three months. Many centuries ago, the sea came up to this spot. We believe this because we find fossil shellfish in the ground.

We are very poor here. Many of us cannot afford to buy meat for months on end. Some of our men go to Nigeria or Zinder to practise petty commerce. Others earn money by making mud bricks for houses.

We would like a grinding mill. At present, we women spend about three hours each day grinding grain to make boule. Look at these big callouses on our thumbs, developed over the years from all the pounding we have to do!

**Assalama Abdau (F, 70 years), Koundoumawa, Zinder**

Assalama first said she was 30 but her one surviving daughter, who looked 60, argued that this was impossible. Intense debate followed and finally 70 was agreed upon. All this seemed to be unimportant to Assalama. She seemed happy to accept any age her younger relatives gave her. Throughout the interview, Assalama sat without moving, her feet lame and swollen.

I was born here. My father was a farmer and blacksmith; every day, after working the fields, he spent some time at his forge. He had apprentices to help him. Lots of people placed great trust in my father and sent their children to be taught by him. In his youth, he spent many hours collecting
iron ore, which he smelted. Today, this takes too much time and scrap metal can easily be found from cars abandoned on the roadside.

Being a blacksmith, my father knew about fire magic. If people were badly burned, more often than not they were taken to my father to be cured. In serious cases, he applied a special powder to the injury and gave the patient a solution to drink. The treatment continued until the wound healed. As part of the cure, he also recited verses. He was known for his powers throughout the region, recognised as an expert on burns. People brought the sick to him from far away and he let them stay, since they could not return home the same day.

My father taught me verses to recite and gave me some very effective powder for treating wounds. Everything had to be very clean before being applied. Once, a child of eight months put his hands in boiling oil. All the skin came away but, with Allah’s help, the wound healed in two weeks. I still have that powder but things have changed: modern youth prefer to go to the dispensary. I can’t force anyone to come to me, but I am always available.

**Faith and fire**

My mother was a marabout’s daughter from the Hausa sherifi, meaning “someone who does not get burnt in the fire”. She had such strong faith, she could put her hand in the fire or a pan of boiling water without scalding it. These powers were a gift from Allah. All the children of a male sherifi take on his powers, whereas only the first children of a woman sherifi do. In my family, not all of my mother’s children are sherifi: I do not have the powers, whereas my brother does. He proved this once, when he took some meat out of boiling oil with his bare hands.

On their wedding day, my parents gave a display of their great powers. They threw petrol on a house, shut themselves in it, then set it on fire. The house burnt with my parents inside. They emerged when the fire faded, alive and unharmed. After that, whenever there were fires in the village, my parents were called upon to take people’s possessions out of the burning houses. Everyone had great respect for my parents; they were honoured people. When my father died, my mother spent her last years far from the village, with one of her sons and his two wives.
I grew millet, and gave away any surplus to the needy rather than selling it. I also grew, spun and sold a lot of cotton to weavers, using the money to pay for livestock, houses and many of my children’s marriage expenses. With the residue and with cash raised from selling animals, I could afford to make a pilgrimage to Makkah. Thus I do not regret all the time I spent working with cotton. The work was very hard but I am thankful that I had the strength to do it. Now, I am tired and cannot work, so I look after my small granddaughters when their mother is working.

**The natural chemist**

When working with cotton, I used a special concoction against fatigue. I gathered roots, bark and leaves, especially from *kirné*, *dâni*, *nonbo* and *kalgo*. When I came home, I put whatever I had collected into a dish with lots of water and left it to infuse. Then I drank the infusion throughout the day to give me energy for my work. Only *kalgo* and *sabara* remain. The forest is poor. Some trees have been cut down by man; others died in the drought. Young people are not as badly affected as we are, because they go to the pharmacy. They don’t use the natural chemist of Africa!

Cooking wood is brought from far away and so is very expensive. It is hard to find wood, or even a dead tree, within about 30 kilometres. To make matters worse, if we cut down trees, we risk a heavy fine.

In my time, when a young bride was brought to her husband’s house for the first day, her parents bought her the basic necessities for married life. These consisted of one mat, three *calabashes*—two for work and one to hold *boule*—and three clay water pots: one to keep drinking water and the other two for use in the kitchen. There were no plastic plates or cups then. All were made from wood and I still use mine today.

I was 12 when I was married and my husband, who was my cousin, was 14. I was his first wife. I did not know him before my wedding day and I did not want to go through with the ceremony, so I ran into the bush and somebody had to come and find me! When I returned, people began to play music and my husband gave me a cow. Later, he took two more wives but one divorced him and the other died. My husband is now dead, too. He had 19 children in all: 11 of them were mine but nine died, mainly of fever when very young. Only the youngest child lives and eats with me here. It’s because of me that he hasn’t left the village after the harvest to find employment elsewhere.

**Malnutrition**

Children are breastfed with no additional supplements until two years old, then they are fed off the family plate. Today, there is much malnutrition.
Look at this baby: you can tell from its hair colour and thin arms that it is ill. Eye and skin complaints are common. We used to prevent our children becoming ill, and heal them, with herbal medicine. Today, mothers don’t have this knowledge and so they wait until the illness has considerably weakened the child before running left and right to look for a remedy.

I can remember three main famines, during which our animal herds were wiped out. The first was caused by grasshoppers and locusts; the others were caused by drought. During the first, I sold the cows I inherited; in the second I sold my sheep; and during the third, my goats. The second famine was the worst in terms of livestock deaths from hunger and thirst. Before the famines, I had over 100 head of cattle, producing so much milk that I gave it away to friends. I did not sell it. After harvest, we kept our animals in the fields to manure the soil. Occasionally, I sold one of my animals to pay for a marriage or to build a house. This house and my son’s house cost 10,000 CFA to build from mud bricks, and took about a month. It was not cheap.

**Locusts**

Grasshoppers and locusts cause us many problems. We have no traditional methods of fighting them, although children catch them to grill and eat. Running through the thick grass to catch them, many children have recently been bitten by snakes. Only yesterday, a girl from this village was bitten. She did not tell her parents but her hand suddenly became very swollen. Her father had to search for the leaves to apply to the wound and cure it. Today, Allah be praised, she has recovered.

In my day, nothing was taken as a contraceptive. We did, however, have traditional methods of family planning. After a woman gave birth, her husband waited two years before sleeping with his wife again. Now men only wait 40 days before returning to their wife’s bedroom. I have heard about a birth control pill on the radio but it has not come here.

We would benefit from new technology, such as carts. Young people would like to work with better equipment, but all they have is hoes. They don’t have the means to buy anything else. They can’t afford to buy animals to pull ploughs, because they have taxes to pay.

The villagers asked us if we would like to meet a village woman with fire powers. We agreed and were led to an old woman, who hurried off and came back clutching a pile of glowing coals in her bare hands. After much pleading and assurances that she had demonstrated her skills adequately, she was persuaded to put the coals down. She held out her palms. They looked remarkably unscathed by the experience.
Kouré (M, 65 years), Takiéta

I was born in early colonial times. The colonialists explored in around 1900 and started ruling by about 1914, when our country was struck by a terrible drought and pitiable famine. Before they succeeded in installing themselves, there was local resistance and fighting. Sultan Amadou Kourén Daga resisted in Tirmini, Damagaram region. In the face of the superior fire power of les blancs, he could not hold out for very long and was eventually killed in Turmuji, his home village. Dan Basa took over as sultan but the colonial administrators replaced him with one of his servants, Ballama. He reigned for about 20 years until overthrown, because servants or slaves have no right to usurp a chieftaincy. Our social structure is not egalitarian, it is organised into groups and sub-groups—castes. These groups interact, but do not intermarry. Most people here are Hausa-speaking Kanuri from Daura, Tuareg, and minority groups, such as Peulh-speakers.

Examples of harsh treatment during colonial times included the imposition of taxes and forced work. Many of us men were forced to build roads. We had little equipment. We had to walk long distances in our bare feet, to carry heavy stones and baskets of sand or pebbles, to cut trees and to dig the road, all by muscle power alone. Numerous cattle were needed to feed all the workers.

Also, local people had to grow cash crops—groundnuts and cotton—to satisfy growing overseas needs for raw materials. People had to do hard work on administrators’ and traditional chiefs’ fields, each one several square kilometres. The tragedy was that the poor working on the fields never benefited from the crops they harvested, even during famines, as the crops were sold secretly. But good things resulted from colonisation as well: new systems of education and social justice were introduced, and there was a new emphasis on equality of men—a concept the local community found difficult to accept.

A merciless famine

The famine coinciding with the rise of the colonial powers was known as Kakalaba, owing to its merciless and ruthless character. In 1927, the Mai Bouhou famine hit the population, so called because people wandered from village to village with empty sacks, looking for food. Later, the Mai Amaro and Mai Zarara famines did little damage to the population. During these famines, the administration reputedly confiscated grain, so some people buried their grain in small holes at a number of different sites, hoping that the soldiers would not find it. As a result of these famines,
about 38 years ago a system of grainbanks was instituted. Each family head gave some millet, sorghum and haricot beans to the village chief after the harvest. Those experiencing difficulties during the year, would ask for a share of the grainbank. The next year, any unused grain was returned to the donor.

I remember when the bush was denser and better stocked than today. This area was full of acacia trees. Among other plants were tamarind trees, shrubs and *sodom apples*. The bush was full of antelopes, gazelles, hyenas, monkeys, big wild cats, guinea-fowl, squirrels, rabbits and hares. Now these animals live far away in areas free from drought and man’s destruction, or else in the mountains. Even there, though, they are rare. The main factors responsible for today’s degradation are the successive years of drought, and population growth with its consequent pressures on land and water resources, such as the uncontrolled clearing of bush for agriculture. Animals left these clearings to look for new homes where there is little or no deforestation. In trying to tackle this deforestation problem, a few new kinds of tree species have been introduced, including eucalyptus and *mesquite*.

Trees are crucial to our life. We feel their loss in different ways: soil fertility is reduced because there is less leaf litter and wood-ash, and wood for fuel or construction is lacking, as are the leaves, bark and roots variously used to treat specific ailments. The drought has destroyed much Sahelian vegetation, killing people and animals in large numbers. Many trees have gone because of excessive cutting down for fuel and for the construction of roofs, fences, sheds, mortars and pestles, hoes, ploughs and works of art. Forty years ago, the colonial government was aware of the negative impact of deforestation and introduced a law requiring people to have special tree-cutting permits. However, the Department of Water and Forests and the Department of Fauna and Flora only began enforcing it two years ago.

**Strong winds**

The strong winds often destroy our grainstores or blow hot ashes about which set fire to the grain. Forest fires are also aggravated by windy conditions. And if the wind blows sand over the young crops before or after their first weeding, it hinders their normal development. We have no traditional methods to protect our crops against the wind’s ravages. Recently, though, people have begun to plant trees to lessen the force of the wind and there are shelter belts in some areas. Winds today are perhaps not as violent and dusty as they were. When I was young, a wind storm completely obscured the sun for three days and people had to cling to trees...
to stop being blown over! This rarely, if ever, happens now. Now, as we have no trees, such winds would blow away the whole village!

It is hard to compare past and present soil fertility. Our fields used to produce more because there was enough free space to allow us to leave our fields fallow every one or two years. Now yields of our traditional species are much lower than before, even with chemical and organic fertilisers. Our fields are dead. To try and improve the situation, I practise mixed farming, growing different crops in the same field. I believe that, despite the shortage of financial and material resources of many peasant farmers like myself, we have benefited to some degree from modern farming methods. Few have the means to use ploughs and carts drawn by animals, or chemical and organic fertiliser or pesticides, but quick-growing crops introduced include four different millet varieties: zango, which takes 80-90 days to mature, dan tchima, dan heca and gundu gundu, which all take only 70 days. There are also two types of sorghum: biririhouta and el bazanga, which take 70 days; and haricot beans—babarbare—which take 40 days.

Today, pastoralists cover large distances to find suitable pasture because of extensive desertification and the change to farming by more and more people. Uncultivated land is now hard to find or non-existent. Here, in Takiéta, pastoralists now have to take their animals 400 kilometres away to Aderbissinat. When I was young, they could find suitable pasture here.

People have a greater spirit of free enterprise, individualism and materialism. This has eroded the past strong community spirit. I remember when the welfare of any individual was everyone’s concern. This changed with the colonials’ introduction of money. People now like to buy animals because they are a good investment. We raise them, sell many at a profit, then use the money to pay for our basic needs, such as food, clothes and marriage or baptism ceremonies.

Land ownership

Once, nobody claimed land as their own. Land was a natural phenomenon, a gift God gave to all living beings. No one sought permission from anyone to clear the bush for farming. This is now changing, as more and more fields become private property. Division of labour and share of the harvest are determined mainly by family size and composition. Our fields are cultivated collectively and the produce stored in grainstores owned by the whole family. The store’s use is monitored by the family head, who has the last word in all family affairs. Since all agricultural produce is shared, land ownership presents few problems.
Land is passed on from father to son. Women do not own land themselves but benefit from land inherited by their husbands. If women inherited land, then land would move from her family into her husband’s. This would conflict with our traditional system, which ensures that land is not transferred between families. Unfortunately, this system is gradually being eroded because of the increasing importance that people attach to money. Land used to be considered an almost sacred family asset; today, fields can be sold as if they were just another item of merchandise. Land is only sold by men. I don’t know why women are not allowed to sell land, as they need money just as much. The practice of selling fields became so corrupt that the chief ordered a moderate percentage of each field’s monetary value to be granted to any women concerned. Before my father died, I gave a field to my brothers, because I already had acquired one in the bush outside Takiéta when land was plentiful and free.

Traditionally, women obey men; the destiny of society is in the hands of men. When a man worthy of being a man spoke, women never contradicted or disobeyed him. Sadly, our women have changed. They are emancipated. They believe more and more in equality with men. It’s a bit as if the world has turned upside down! The same is true of the youth: they no longer respect their elders. They all want to be modern, so reject traditional values. Our own daughters no longer ask our advice: they think they know all there is to know. They want to choose their own husbands and some don’t want to marry at all—the towns and villages are full of bastards! After going to school, boys no longer want to work the land. Even failed scholars with no qualifications think they deserve a salaried job; they grow fat on the blood of unemployment and delinquency.

**N19 El Haj Chaïbou Bagouma (M, 87 years), Takiéta**

Bagouma was a stately old man, composed and gentle. As the right-hand man of the chef du canton, he spent his days sitting in the chief’s courtyard, from whence he could be easily beckoned to do whatever the chief required. He is the most senior member of the chief’s staff, who acts as his secretary and intermediary, and has the power to settle certain cases or disputes after full consultation with the chief’s son, Ibrahim.

I am from the Zarma tribe and have spent the last 67 years here. Before that, I was at Fandou, Fillingué district, Niamey département. When the colonial government arrived, I was too young to be recruited into the army
but was employed as a “boy”, cooking in a colonial household. The family employing me lived in Damagaram, Zinder, which is why I am here today.

Afterwards, I joined a team of 600 to 700 men conscripted for road work and was put in charge of them. We worked with the bare minimum of equipment, carrying all raw materials—water, sand and gravel—on our heads to the site. Les blancs lent us horses to travel into town to find the labourers needed. To feed this big workforce, they also bought many hundreds of animals.

In those days, we detested military service—compulsory for most men—and hated the schools of les blancs. The authorities ordered the chiefs to send their children to these schools but, initially, they were reluctant and often sent their subjects’ children instead. These educated children then rose rapidly within the administration and soon were giving orders to their chiefs! The traditional hierarchy was being overturned. So chiefs now send their children to school.

**Raiding and plundering**
My parents were agro-pastoralists but also practised commerce and warmongering! In those days, there were wars between Tuareg and
Zarma, among the Zarma themselves, and between farmers and pastoralists. It was an age when courage was highly esteemed. Some men were so brave that they could fight a whole village on their own. My grandfather, Issa Korombé, was a famous fighter in his village. He was one of those warriors who resisted *les blancs* when they came.

Much raiding and plundering went on during my youth; the Tuareg were particularly notorious. The colonial administration’s law and order put an end to such villainous activities. It also introduced social justice, peace and security. In those days, shame fell on the whole family of those who went to prison. This is no longer the case. *Les blancs* also broke “the yoke of ignorance” which bound us. Despite making us suffer with enforced road building, they brought us many things and helped us. The journey between Zinder and Niamey took 37 days by foot, now it takes just a few hours.

*The value of money*

The value of money has multiplied of its own account. Not only has there been five-fold inflation, but so much money is circulating that even small children can be seen clutching it. In the past, it was quite unusual to sell anything. Goods were bartered: your millet was exchanged for your neighbour’s haricot beans, sorghum or even livestock. Money had very little meaning to most of us, which is why it is so difficult to estimate the price of grain then. Famines and food shortages were two of the rare times when goods were bought or sold for cash. At such times, grain prices soared. After the 1984 drought, a measure of millet costing between 125 and 150 CFA rocketed up to 500 or 600 CFA. This is not unusual. Prices always rise after any bad harvest.

It is difficult to estimate past crop yields, because we used different measures. Grain was stored either in tchukurfas, sacks woven from *dom* or *horassus* leaves, or in taikis, containers made from cowhide—those made from goatskin or sheepskin were more often used to carry water.

I first had to buy millet 30 years ago, when a bad harvest forced us to sell our domestic animals to buy grain. Those without sheep, goats or cows resorted to small-scale trading or to selling wood and hay. Some found employment with the more affluent; others migrated to find work elsewhere and earn money to feed their hungry families.

Without irrigation, we have not been able to practise dry-season vegetable gardening. We hope to, though, because it would supplement our income and give us some security in years of poor rainfall. At present, we wait for the rains before planting our staple crops: millet, sorghum, haricot beans and sorrel. In good years, any surplus is sold to buy other
essentials, such as clothes and livestock, or to pay taxes or for baptism and marriage ceremonies.

We sell cereals only in exceptional circumstances, although cash crops—groundnuts, haricot and sorrel—are regularly sold to increase our income. A few years ago, the government introduced a grain bank, to give food security during famines. Every year each peasant puts millet and sorghum or, in rare cases, haricot beans into a grain bank under his chief’s safekeeping, taking it out when the rains come the next year.

We still use the traditional farm tools used by our parents and grandparents. Although we would all like to use draught animals, few of us can afford oxen to pull ploughs. We maintain soil fertility with manure and chemical fertilisers. We used to leave the stubble to sustain the soil, but recently, agricultural extension workers have shown us that the stems hide all sorts of destructive pests. We now cut down the stems as soon as the harvest is over.

**Land shortages**

In the past, there were fewer people and the land was free. Even strangers could ask the chief for land. Land was inherited, was loaned to neighbours, but was too sacred to be bought or sold. Today, the ground is no longer respected: it has become just a saleable product, like any other. Our monetary economy has reduced our land to common merchandise. The “population explosion” has aggravated the problem, creating land shortages. When I was young, the bush seemed so vast that we never believed our fields would exhaust it. It was full of wildlife—some of it dangerous—and farmers had to keep constant watch to ensure their fields were not damaged by monkeys, birds, antelope or guinea-fowl.

Today, because there are so many people, our fields have shrunk. Those which once belonged to one person are now used by five. As population grows, soil productivity and yields decrease. To compensate for this, trees are being savaged to clear ground for agriculture. That hill, 300 metres away, could not be seen through the thick vegetation in the old days. Some village people’s only means of income is to sell wood for

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*N38 Gawa Assoumane (M, 85 years), Tibiri*

It is never a good idea to keep money, it is better to turn it into some sort of concrete object. Animals in particular are a good investment because you can be sure that you will never have any difficulties selling them.

In a group of children there will always be some who are lazy and do nothing to help. If, therefore, you have a lot of children you can maximise your chances of having some who will be useful.
fuel or construction. When the government realised how many trees were being cleared, they passed a law. Now, permits are required to cut trees. Without this law slowing down the rate of clearance, there would be no trees left in our country. As it is, dargaza, dilo, zouré and hano trees have completely disappeared, and leyara, raria, gamba, nobi, tsabre and zamarke grasses are decreasing.
Garba Adamou (M, 38 years), Abalak

In Tamashék, “abalak” means “an abundance of water” and the village is named after the big lake next to it. Lake Abalak has proved ideal for fishing and fish farming.

My parents come from Tamaské but I was born and spent the first 13 years of my life in Nigeria. Twenty-five years ago, I came to Abalak. My main job was fishing, which I had done since I was 10. I also did a little farming to supplement my income but very much as a secondary activity.

I have travelled widely, working on the Senegal River near Gaya, in Nigeria, and in Chad. I decided to leave Nigeria to visit relations in Adouna, near Tamaske. I stayed there until the Ministry of Water and Forests told me about Lake Abalak and I came to see if a fisherman could make a living here. The quality and quantity of fish are high and I am now head of about 30 fishermen, who have great respect for me and ask my advice about problems with money or the authorities. Fourteen years ago, les blancs helped our fishing business get off the ground by providing materials and training. We would benefit from more of this kind of help.

At present, we are organising a fishermen’s cooperative to help us run our own affairs, and this seems to be working very well.

I have no relatives here and my parents are dead. I am head of my family, with three wives and some children. It is hard to live here, because many people have taken up fishing and none of us can catch many fish. Also, bandits add to our hardships: while fishing in Lake Chad, I had 400,000 CFA’s worth of equipment stolen. Our pirogues are the most expensive and precious item, worth 40,000 CFA or more, but nets, fishing lines, hooks and calabashes are also crucial to our work. We buy pirogues in Yaouri, Nigeria, since there are none in Niger. Boats are best built from the hollowed-out trunks of red mad’atchi wood, but we are forbidden to cut down this rare tree in Niger. A well-made boat lasts seven years.

In Lake Abalak there is a great variety of fish: long guechi, flat spiney bokon, rambouchi, silure, herring, kouma, konkoura and the largest fish of all, the capitaine, known as “the elephant of the water”. Of these guechi and bokon are the most common. The most profitable are the capitaine—a large fish can fetch 5,000 CFA—and the guechi, which reaches 1,000 CFA per kilo. Some capitaines are more than 2 metres long; other fish rarely exceed 1 metre.

We used to take the catch to Arlit, Agadez, Niamey, Maradi or Nigeria, where we normally found a good market for fish. Today, our market is
Fish did not sell well. People considered them to be like snakes or frogs and hated the smell. very secure and traders from these towns come here to buy. Our regular clients have risen from two to around 100. Sometimes, I take fish myself in a lorry to Nigeria. The journey takes two to three days but you can be sure of selling the fish at the end of it—even if it is rotten! The Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria have a particular taste for it.

Sometimes, if I can’t sell the fish immediately, I dry them. I learnt this simple technique in Chad. I gut the fish, coat it with salt, then lie it in the sun to dry. The Chadians, Malians and Senegalese are good fishermen and taught me much about good preservation techniques.

Fish: an acquired taste

When I first came here, fish did not sell well. People considered them to be like snakes or frogs and hated the smell. It was not easy to introduce my trade. Even though I began by asking very low prices, only workers from other parts of the country bought fish. Gradually, however, others became accustomed to the taste. I spent a long time giving free fish to people hoping to convert them, which was not very profitable as the Tuareg were so repelled by the smell. But I felt there was no other way to encourage them to taste fish. Now the Tuareg like fish, but put perfume on their body to hide its smell when they eat it!

I use the same fishing methods here as I did in Nigeria. Little children use hooks and lines with bits of meat to catch small fish for their family. We fishermen take our pirogues to the middle of the lake and drop big nets, capable of catching many fish. The Ministry of Water and Forests sets no limit on our catch size, but we do have to pay a tax: 40,000 CFA for those selling fish in Nigeria and 11,000 CFA for those selling fish in Niger. Even children using lines from the shore have to pay tax.

Environmental degradation has caused rainfall to diminish which, in turn, affects the lake’s water level. This is unhealthy for the fish population and so, to help maintain a natural equilibrium, we plant trees. As a rule, the water level falls in December and gets higher from July to November. During the 1973 drought, there was no water at all left in the lake: we had to dig holes in the lake floor to make small ponds for the fish. We put cow dung in the holes to help the fish to breed. It was a terrible year. We suffered great losses of fish, animals and trees. During the drought, when the water level was low, it was easier to catch the fish as there was so much less water. However, we could not sell them here. They had to be exported to Nigeria for money to buy grain for our families.

The year 1984 was another difficult one, when the water level fell dangerously. If fish die during droughts, we introduce new fish stock for
breeding. Since 1984, things have returned to normal and now the lake has enough water, being 6 to 8 metres deep in the middle. The water is of a good quality and bilharzia-free and we can drink it—something impossible in Nigeria.

**Fishermen’s secrets**

We have secrets of our trade, but do not put our newborn infants in the river to see if they will live, like some fishermen do. Some say this is the only way to test whether the child is really a fisherman’s son. The child is left in the water for a week. If it is still alive when its parents return, then the father can be sure that it really is his son or daughter. The truth of the matter is that the parents leave a genie in the water with the child, who guards the baby until its parents return. This practice still exists in some areas but we do not do it ourselves.

I possess a special magic which means I can go into water where hippos lurk, knowing that nothing will hurt me. Some medicines can only be given to our own children. We also have secret medicines to administer when someone gets a fish bone or spike stuck in their throat. I could give you medicine to let you eat whatever fish you liked without any danger.

**Group interview with four Peulh pastoralists, Abalak**

Aicho Benno (F, 40 years)  
Jima Bello (F, 42 years)  
Ibrahim Karu (M, 50 years)  
Mamane Dan N’anto (M, 46 years)

The chef des bouchers buys meat regularly from the Peulh and has built up a close friendship with them. Whenever the Peulh arrive in the village, they always go directly to the chef des bouchers, who looks after them. Pastoralists are particularly keen to sell their sick animals to him, at a reduced price, before they die. He has better facilities than they have and can treat the animal or keep it for a while before slaughtering it.

We were born in Madaoua département, near Abalak. We came to Abalak four years ago after being forced to move from Madaoua, because there was no more free grazing land. Everything has been taken over by the Hausa, who have turned our grazing land into agricultural fields. They were making us pay to keep our animals in the fields after the harvest, even though the fields were free land. That is why we came here, where there was plenty of free pasture and few farmers. Also, we had the free
We were so attached to our animals... sometimes we could not even eat the meat of a cow that had died

use of a pump for the animals' drinking water. Unfortunately, after we arrived, large numbers of Hausa people took a new interest in the land. Today, it is nearly all occupied. To make matters worse, they have taken up vegetable gardening and use so much water from the pumps that we now have to pay for our animals' drinking water. We do not have an amicable relationship with the Hausa: they treat us badly.

**On the move**

Until 1984, we moved around with our big herds. When we found an area with thick green vegetation, we would stop for six or seven days, until the grass was so trampled, dirty and stinking of urine that the animals no longer wanted to eat it. Before we changed pasture, one or two men would go ahead on the back of a camel or donkey to inspect other areas, always somewhere there was either a pond, lake or well. Having found a suitable spot, the men returned and the group packed up their possessions and moved on. We stayed together as we travelled. All our goods were carried by camels, donkeys and cows but you would never see a Peulh pastoralist separated from his staff. It was as important as a gun is to a soldier, being his main means of defence and his companion on the road. Generally, men rode camels and women were happy to travel on donkeys or cows.

We were content with this nomadic way of life and enjoyed moving on from place to place. As long as our animals had enough to eat, we had no worries. We were so attached to our animals that we could not stand to see them suffering: sometimes we could not even eat the meat of a cow that had died. We were sentimental about them. We had grown up together and had a parental bond with them—it is difficult to explain exactly.

In those days, we lived on milk, cheese and cereals. To buy the grain, we sold two or three animals, or milk and cheese. We have never done any farming ourselves. Our parents and their ancestors never did: they were pastoralists. Only in the last few years, with the terrible drought and famine, have our animals died from lack of pasture and thirst. Sometimes, we take sick animals to the Pastoralists' Service Centre, and pay for them to be cured.

**Loss of pasture**

When we first arrived here, the vegetation was different. In those days, we lived in peace and abundance. Now our beasts are threatened by the poor vegetation: they have become feeble and thin. In our opinion, the main reason for this degradation is the lack of rain. On top of this, the increasing population ceaselessly exploits the land for agriculture. Farmers cut down trees, pull up grass and bushes, and clear more and more
land. To enrich the soil, some of them burn over the ground which, stripped naked of vegetation, is then susceptible to wind erosion.

All this has led to social and material poverty: juvenile delinquency, prostitution, theft and crime are all on the increase. Certain illnesses, particularly fevers, are more and more common, both among people and animals. When we fall ill, we have to buy medicines, but it is hard to find enough money. We also have to pay for water. Everything has become so much more expensive and we have less money than before. Solidarity, once so strong in the community, has disappeared and has been replaced by blatant self-interest. Our only hope is that life will improve and return to what it was a long time ago. Most of all, we would like to be able to build up our herds, so that we can return to our nomadic way of life. We do not like to be in one place all the time. In order to achieve this, we ask for support from the government and from aid agencies.

_I was born here in Tibiri in the reign of Chief Alou. I used to be a griot, but there was not enough work to keep me going, so now I practise mixed farming and pastoralism. I never went to school as a boy, my only formal training was in the army._

In the old days, life was harder due to famine: people sacrificed everything in the search for food. However, winds are stronger than before, because all the trees which act as a buffer against violent storms have been cut down. Valuable plants and trees include _kangna, aorawa, taoura_ and _tchiriri_. We mistrust people who cut down _gawo_ trees: these grow in our fields because we feel that they benefit our crops.

_Quality of soil_
We use manure to improve soil quality. We encourage pastoralists to put their animals on our fields, but if we can’t manage this, then we carry the

_N44 Kaka Bouchia (M, 40 years), Tibiri_

The first times we heard a car we knew it was the man coming to collect our taxes, so we would run into the bush, or under our beds, to hide. My grandfather used to say to me that a day would come when women would be able to overtake men. He was right, because since the car was invented they have been able to do this!
In the past children used to constitute our wealth, but this is not so much the case today, because we have a number of labour-saving devices that do the jobs that children used to do.
A wise old man would never lie... even if he was mad

manure to the fields on our heads. In my day, charlatans gave farmers a medicine which supposedly increased yields.

We no longer dare to leave land fallow, since we fear that it will be claimed by someone else. We plant our fields with one or two strips of millet, then a strip of groundnuts; sorghum is planted under trees. We eat most of our crops, although the surplus in a good year is sold for money. A sack of millet fetches 5,000 CFA. Once, we only planted millet, but now the climate has changed so much that other crops can grow.

Migration

During the dead dry season, some people trade, others sell banco to build houses. Pastoralists make contracts to provide manure from their animals. Those with nothing else to do migrate to Kano [Nigeria], Niamey, Benin and Ghana. Women rarely migrate, unless they are escaping from an arranged marriage or their children have nothing to eat. Unsuccessful migrants resort to delinquency and prostitution.

Fields are prepared for replanting before the rains. Fences are put up round the fields and the weeds that cause most damage—kassouura, kiassoua, bilbilwo, koumoudoua and kirikiri—are regularly pulled up and burnt. Women are busy with housework, although most also grow groundnuts.

Today, we are much better supplied with water. Free wells were built all around the village and this has greatly reduced women’s work. They still have to get wood, which they may collect secretly from the bush. It is harder to find now than it was in the past. So some wood is bought, collected by lorryload from far away.

Pastoralists cause farmers many problems by driving their animals into their fields. Sometimes, the ensuing dispute can be resolved by the chief, who decides on the level of compensation to be paid. At other times, the issue may escalate into a bloody battle. I am a farmer, so I entrust the care of my animals to my son and grandchildren. If I had no children, I would have to keep a section of my field free for my animals. Increasingly, sheep, goats, cows and camels are being monopolised by a few rich people, who own huge numbers of them.

Education and social change

What I find most astonishing about our society is the way in which traditional chiefs succeed each other: one dies and one of his descendants takes his place. Our social structure has been turned upside down by the increasing emphasis put on education. Once, old people were considered the wisest and were always consulted. They were well respected: one
knew that a wise old man would never lie. Even if he was mad, he could not be contradicted. If you spoke against him, it was like placing a death threat upon yourself. Nowadays, because of education, people listen to the young. Modern schools have rapidly replaced Qur'anic schools.

When I was young, strength was everything. Wars were won by force. If someone came from another country with a great fortune, you killed him and took all he had. It was good. The only problem was that his relatives sometimes got wind of the atrocity, then came in a group to take their revenge on you and your family. Now customs officers ensure the security of our frontiers and enforce law and order.

Sicknesses are caused by the cold weather or, occasionally, by the devil and can be very dangerous. The most common are haemorrhoids and swellings. Venereal diseases are particularly bad and result in swollen testicles and impotence. A dispensary has recently been built in the town, so people place less emphasis on traditional medicine, although those in rural areas continue to take herbal remedies. Two of the most popular traditional medicines are made from the roots of _anza_ and _agadjini_ trees.

My main hope for the village is that they should have a good rainy season. My dreams for my future are that I have enough to eat and drink and stay in good health. Now that I am old, all that I need is my health, so that I can appreciate the last years of my life. I want to die in my village.
Country Profile: CHAD
Human Development Index (UNDP): 152nd out of 160 nations
Life expectancy at birth (1990): 46.5 years
Population per doctor (1984): 38,360
Adult literacy (1985): male 34%; female 13%
Labour force employed in agriculture (1985-1988): 83%
GDP from agriculture and livestock (1988): 46.1%
Principal exports: cotton, livestock

1890s Chad was one of the last territories to form part of French Equatorial Africa. 1960 Full independence. 1962 President Tombalbaye bans all political parties and creates one-party state. Country subsequently divided by recurring civil wars, in which France and Libya support opposing factions. 1975 Tombalbaye killed in army coup. 1987 Libyan troops expelled. Hissein Habré assumes presidential power. 1990 Dec: Habré flees country after three-week war. Idriss Deby establishes Conseil d’Etat and pledges a pluralist democracy.