

CASE STUDY



The Kadougou microdam: A catalyst for ending 30 years of division



A 30-year period of community division has been brought to an end with the help of an Islamic Relief project focused on improving irrigation and enhancing food security. Islamic Relief works to ensure that the development of social cohesion is a cross-cutting component across all of our programming. As a result, and despite social cohesion not being a formal outcome of the project, its participatory approach and support of collaborative community mechanisms nonetheless brought community members together in pursuit of shared economic benefits. This has resulted in lasting social cohesion.



Supporting social cohesion

Islamic Relief launched the Supporting Education, Livelihoods and WASH* in the Circle of Kati project in November 2022. As part of this project, a microdam was built in Kati Circle in order to improve irrigation and enhance food security.

While increased social cohesion was not defined as a formal project outcome, a participatory, community-led and community-owned approach nonetheless provided the catalyst for easing divisions within the wider community.

Where pre-existing structures had broken down, community mechanisms were either repaired or established in order to ensure broad community involvement in the project and to help facilitate the resolution of any disputes which might arise. The Microdam Management Committee, for example, included representatives from all ethnicities and both villages. The engagement of faith and community leaders and local decision-makers from both villages and all ethnic groups further helped to ensure that the project was responding to identified needs. This engagement also encouraged community members to come together at an inclusive meeting [where government representatives and Islamic Relief staff were also present] at which committee members were selected.

Community breakdown

The villages of Kanabougou and Kodougou are located next to each other in the Kati Circle, western Mali. Their residents belong to four ethnic groups: the Coulibaly and Konate from Kanabougou, and the Diarra and the Diallo from Kodougou.

The villages have traditionally operated together as a broad, single community, with relationships prospering and cross-community marriages taking place routinely. Social and cultural events, such as festivals, naming ceremonies, burials and weddings, would regularly bring people together from both villages. The broader community would also work together on the gathering and sale of the rice harvest. Both villages were further bound into a single community through shared administrative and governance structures. This was consolidated by the selection of a village chief, nominated by the Coulibaly/Konate and the Diarra/Diallo on an alternating basis.

Cohesion within the wider community broke down three decades ago as a result of disputes over power and governance. In particular, power dynamics relating to the selection of the village chief – and how the chief exercised their power – led to tension between the villages. The escalation of this tension instigated a 30-year period of division and the breakdown of all collective social, cultural, economic and administrative systems.

Subsequently, social and cultural events became defined along ethnic lines. Marriages between individuals from both villages were no longer socially acceptable. Collective farming broke down and the rice harvest, a major source of income in the region, was now conducted separately. This lack of coordination damaged efficiency and economic productivity across the two communities. Furthermore, the failure to select a shared village chief over a period of 30 years, further institutionalised division and saw the two villages begin the process of formally separating into two distinct administrations.

A stronger community

With mechanisms such as the Microdam Management Committee and community-wide engagement meetings in place, Islamic Relief strengthened a sustainable framework which supported the development of social cohesion across divides.

Cross-community social events, including weddings, began to resume. The villages once again began to support each other and cooperate on an economic basis with the resumption of collective community farming, particularly concerning the important rice harvest. Community administration and shared governance was remedied and strengthened, with the community appointing a new village chief for the first time in 30 years. The Microdam Management Committee provided a forum for continued collective engagement over shared resources whilst also acting as an exemplar of collective decision-making.

‘My sincere thanks go to Islamic Relief Mali and the donors for providing us with such a high-quality microdam which will improve food security in the long run. The biggest tribute to be paid [is to the] inhabitants – living in togetherness, union and harmony after 30 years of brawl, rivalry, enmity, egocentrism and conflict.’

– Mori Konate, President of Kodougou Micro-Dam Management Committee

*WASH is an acronym referring to water, sanitation and hygiene.